SOME SEA TERMS IN LAND SPEECH

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If the long-expected visitor from Mars should happen to alight in an English-speaking country, he would soon deduce the fact (assuming him to be equipped _inter alia_ with a modicum of philology) that the inhabitants were of an essentially sea-faring stock—that is, if he were merely to listen to their conversation. No language in the world is so replete with nautical terms, and language is the great mirror of a nation's habits and history. The mouth speaketh not only out of the fulness of the heart, but out of the fulness of experience and long-wonted usage, as the Martian scriptures possibly recognize; and he would find that although the soldier, the farmer, the lawyer, the hunter, the merchant, and many others have contributed liberally from their special vocabularies to the common storehouse of our daily speech, yet for extent and picturesqueness it is doubtful if any one has approached the wealth of phrase supplied by the sailor.

This sea talk is sometimes patent and obvious, but more frequently obscured and ingrained—assimilated to a point where its original significance is overlooked and forgotten—a sure indication of its antiquity. The very depth and pervasiveness of its penetration into the mother tongue is the best proof that the speakers are seamen by inheritance and tradition, though not necessarily by actual vocation.

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The most striking example of the thesis is to be found in America to-day. It is true that owing to certain political and economic causes the maritime interests of our generation seem to be at slack water, but the two hundred years of ceaseless sea-going activities by our fathers have left their impress deep and wide upon our idioms and homely turns of talk; and when the day comes—as come it may at any time—when we turn oceanward once more, the old parlance will stir within us, and we shall go forth upon the deep as children go responsive to the speech of their mother.

These conditions and possibilities are best observed among us here in New England, because this locality was the factory in which the greater part of our national speech has been shaped. The dialect of the genuine Yankee probably contains a larger admixture of sea terms than that of any other portion of the Anglo-Saxon race. This is the result of a cumulative series of historical, social, and commercial causes, each in turn intensifying the effect of its forerunners and adding another stratum to the final product.

The early colonists, to begin with, brought with them in their Elizabethan English a sturdy basis of the older sea language. The mother country was then just emerging into the greatest sea power of modern times, and the pride in sea victories and sea discoveries that was bursting from every lip had no small influence on the mother tongue, at precisely the period when it was assuming its modern form. For example, the common adjectives "first-rate," "second-rate," etc., come down to us from the five rates or sizes of ships of war, a classification which was in use as early as the Restoration. Even be-
fore that time, "flotsam" (floating wreckage) had been coupled to "jetsam" (cargo thrown overboard) in the well-known equivalent for odds and ends. "To give a wide berth" to an undesirable acquaintance has no reference to an unusually spacious bed, but traces back to the sixteenth-century word for sea room. Even the translators of the King James Version found at their hands such terms as "castaway," a shore-going substantive already formed from a nautical verb for shipwreck.

For over a century after their settlement the American colonies remained essentially a seaboard community. Their attention was fixed far more upon the water than upon the land, so that many words describing the country actually disappeared from use (such as "spinney," "copse," "eyot," "wold," and "downs") while maritime terms became more and more common. The fishing industry was very early developed, followed by a considerable coastwise trade, both of which added to the general nautical vocabulary. Local intercommunication also, in the absence of good roads, was almost entirely by sailing vessels, so that both travellers and merchants became as thoroughly saturated with honest salt-water talk as the professional sailors. Would that the conscientious chronicler could omit at this point all reference to the darker and more sinister locutions that still remind us of the days of the pirates, the smugglers, and the slave traders, all well-recognized figures at various stages of our maritime history. It is pleasanter to recall that New England attained fame throughout the world by its exploits in the whale fishery, that vast (and legitimate) fortunes were made in the China trade, and that nothing
in the annals of the sea can surpass that amazing climax, the ocean races round the Horn in the days of '49.

Each of these developments enriched the popular idiom, already surcharged with nauticalisms, by its own peculiar terminology. It is the whalemens, for example, that we must thank for that masterly description of a hasty eater who "harpoons" his food. The slang metaphor of "getting a line on" a rival or his schemes appears to have evolved from the literal operation of making fast to a whale, whose movements can thereafter be followed and taken advantage of. And the word for whale-fat, "blubber," is transferred with indescribable appositeness, to the oleaginous lamentations of the small boy. The days of the clipper-ships, when speed was all-essential, led to such unheard-of recklessness in carrying sail that flighty or foolhardy conduct ashore is still reprehended as "carrying on." (The nearly synonymous "skylarking" appears to be obscurely connected with sailors' pranks while clambering about the rigging and tops.)

Meantime Yankee ingenuity had been applied to seafaring as to every other occupation. The technique of shipbuilding, rigging, and handling was enormously improved and extended, and called for constant additions to the sailor's phrase-book, until the culmination was reached in that acme of grace and speed, the American "clipper," which has itself become a synonym among landsmen for smartness and handsomeness. Apparently realizing that the limit had been reached in that direction, the national genius turned to vessels of war, and during the Rebellion evoked the monitor and the "iron-clad," the last a familiar adjective to-day. At the same
time the rise of steam navigation engaged the popular attention, and contributed to general conversation such metaphors as "stoking up," "blowing off steam," and "full speed ahead." The arrangements of the early passenger steamers apparently produced the well-worn witticisms, "Step up to the Captain's office," and "No talking to the man at the wheel." (Nothing is as funny aboard ship as a passenger.)

For a couple of centuries, therefore, a steady stream of maritime words and phrases poured into our local speech. A vast number of them found permanent lodgment therein, and as the sons of the Puritans scattered throughout the continent, are still to be heard wherever that speech is employed with fair purity and zest.

Nor is the process entirely at an end even yet. Our community still possesses the two greatest fishing fleets in the country, and spots are still to be found where the whole population expresses itself in the undiluted patois of the forecastle, the whale-boat, and the dory. Again, our locality has been the center of development of the beautiful sport of yachting; Marblehead is said to shelter more pleasure craft in a season than any other harbor in the world, with the single exception of Cowes, England. And the phraseology of small boat racing and cruising has tended to instill a large number of nautical terms into the discourse of thousands otherwise uninterested in life on the blue water.

It is significant to notice how this naval element has pervaded every grade and stratum of the language, from the frankly vulgar to the delicately poetical—from "tarred with the same stick" to "deep-freighted argosies." The former is not surprising, for much of the
vocabulary was brought ashore by poor Jack into an atmosphere of Billingsgate and Wapping. Here some of it has remained, but much has appealed, from its aptness and picturesqueness, to the man in the street, and forms a large part of ordinary colloquial conversation. The base-ball umpire calls the next batsman "on deck," the hotel porters "stand watch and watch," and the discarded employee complains he has been "thrown overboard." Not a little, too, has risen into the upper circles of polite society, where it has met another more elegant contingent originally introduced by the ship's officers, supercargoes, and owners. "To give a clean bill of health" after investigating an individual or an institution is an echo of the necessary formalities on entering port. Conversely, the irritable "Clear out!" addressed to an unwelcome visitor is nothing but the regular maritime phrase for the departure of a vessel after obtaining her clearance papers; in the same metaphor "a good clearance" is equivalent to a good riddance. The somewhat peculiar sea-going use of the word "people" for the whole ship's company is probably responsible for such expressions as "How are all your people?" originally addressed by one captain to another.

The force and dramatic connotations of this racy diction have not been lost on the literary fraternity. At first perhaps brought in apologetically, by the same surreptitious back door that has admitted so much slang to the dictionaries, many a word reeking with bilgewater has found its way into the books, and full of recognized usefulness and vigor appears unabashed in the most refined surroundings. In addition to the saline flavor thus imparted to general writing, a considerable body of dis-
tinctively sea literature has been produced in New England, from Bowditch’s *Navigator* to Dana’s *Two Years*, and has been eagerly perused by successive generations, who have not neglected either the mass of equally popular work that has been accumulating in Old England ever since the days of Pepys and Smollett.

Thus, carried hundreds of leagues from their ocean home by the migratory habits of our population, by ancestral hearsay, by the printed page, and by imitation, appreciative if unintelligent, the words and phrases of the sea have been woven into the talk of the countryside by the mysterious aptitude by which the Anglo-Saxon subconsciously assimilates all things maritime. As a combined result of all these agencies we find pastoral beings who never saw so much as a cat-boat exchanging with naïve gusto swashing deep-water dialogue about as appropriate in the wheat-field or the dairy as the jargon of an art studio employed in a coal mine. There is not a more curious instance of heredity triumphant over environment. The very facility with which a plainsman or a mountaineer adopts a nautical terminology shows that his blood retains a latent dash of sea water handed down from his sailor ancestors. It is another illustration of our innate fellowship for the great deep that fills our navy with recruits from Kansas and Dakota.

An interesting proof of this proposition is the instinctive rightness with which the material is handled. While three-fourths of the sea terms in our conversation are used in total unconsciousness of their meaning and origin, they are almost always applied with perfect correctness, at least in the figurative sense. Thus a project that, like a ship, has long been “on the stocks” in process of
preparation, is finally "launched" and "gets under way." If it continues to "make headway" (the opposite of making sternway or going backward) it is later spoken of as "forging ahead"—technically implying a more ponderous advance, often from the mere weight of momentum. On the other hand, if unsuccessful, the effort may be continued "until the last gun is fired," or until reaching "the last shot in the locker"—unrecognized bits of old navy talk. From the same profession come various other unsuspected common phrases. The automobilist declares after an accident that his machine is "out of commission"—properly said only of an inactive man-of-war—or that he himself is "laid up"—the full expression for a disused frigate is "laid up in ordinary." A formidable fighting phrase, "the decks are cleared for action," is often most peacefully employed to denote that the preliminaries of an affair are disposed of and all obstructions removed, which is its precise technical meaning.

The sea verb to "stand by," meaning to be ready, especially in a helpful sense, has unwittingly become the land substantive for a thoroughly dependable person. "In the long run," signifying after considerable experience, is a locution suggesting to the merchant skipper the short runs of a vessel from port to port collecting cargo, followed by her long run across the ocean, when her real qualities are tested. "Coming down by the run," however, often used of the headlong descent of persons or things ashore, refers to sails, cargo, or other objects which having been hoisted up are allowed to drop suddenly by letting the rope run loose. The word "caboose" meant for centuries a small deck-house where-
in the cooking was done; it has recently been appropriated for the small car, usually attached to the end of a freight-train, containing a stove and bunks, where the trainmen eat and sleep while on the road.

Indeed the railroads, the newly-developed competitors of shipping, have naturally, in building up their special vocabulary, stolen a good deal of their rivals' thunder, and applied it aptly enough in a brand-new environment. Thus the coal-car of the engine has usurped the appellation of "tender," properly a small vessel serving as auxiliary and store-ship to a larger one. The sleeping car has its "berths" and the dining car its "steward." The trainmen form a "crew." "Freight" is now carried in cars as well as in bottoms, though the English prefer to speak of a goods van. A train, like a ship, may be "wrecked." The conductor, clad in a neat navy-blue uniform, shouts "All aboard!" to embark his passengers, and merchandise is "trans-shipped" on the dry land. Perhaps the most curious physical imitation has been the equipping of the American locomotive with what is practically a ship's bell, an object which is said to excite among Europeans a mixture of amazement and religious awe.

Most of the above sea terms, as has been said, are used with great pertinency, but in complete unconsciousness of their derivation. Some, on the other hand, seem to be employed in common speech with a more or less clear understanding of their original sense, and then almost always semi-humorously, as if in appreciation of the incongruousness of their appearance so far from home. The tramp or "beach-comber" is seized by the "slack" of his nether garments and "hauled in" to the station-
house, even ashore sometimes referred to as "the brig." The tailor is directed to "take a reef" in a baggy coat. A diary is often spoken of as a "log," a watch as a "chronometer," and a bed as a "bunk." The guide "takes in tow" his "convoy" of sightseers, "hailing from" another city, "pilots" them about town, following obediently "in his wake," and finally gets the "heading for" home. A storm is described by the old navy phrase as "blowing great guns." An arduous undertaking requires that "all hands and the cook" shall "turn to" upon it. A director who is a mere "figurehead" recalls most aptly that strange survival from mediæval shipbuilding, at once the most prominent, expensive, and useless ornament of the whole construction. Anything resembling a sinecure is "a soft berth," while shirking is scornfully denominated "soldiering," a reproach undoubtedly originating aboard troopships, where it must be admitted the sons of Mars do not cut a very active figure. Indeed, your man-o'wars-man has never had a high opinion of the intelligence of his military brethren, as witness his classic re- tort, "Tell that to the marines!" Here also might be mentioned the well-known humorous idiom of the tar overcome by emotion, who "pipes his eye."

Appropriately employed as are so many of these phrases, it is not surprising to find a few that have "shifted cargo" badly on their long voyage inland, and are used quite erroneously. To "bear a hand" carries a deceptive suggestion of offering aid; to a sailor it means to make haste. The petty officer in the navy known as "master-at-arms" masquerades in freshwater districts as an instructor in swordsmanship, musketry, etc., whereas in the service he is nothing but the ship's policeman.
Again, ever since the days of Poor Tom Bowling a "sheer hulk" has stuck in the landsman's mind as a synonym for a complete wreck, apparently on the analogy of sheer folly, sheer nonsense, and the like. This is partly a matter of mis-spelling—Jack was never handy with his writing gear. In the old days of enormous masts built up of pieces hooped together, it was a serious problem to hoist them into a ship or get them out again. Floating derricks or shears were therefore rigged on discarded hulks, the last stage of usefulness of many a noble frigate or East India-man. "Sheer hulk," consequently, carries neither the accent, the spelling, nor the meaning it should, for a "shear hulk" was extremely handy in its place. "Waster," as a term of reproach, especially in England, is another strange example of altered spelling and meaning. When the navy was manned by the exertions of the press-gang, a commander put to sea with a sadly heterogeneous crew, many of them eminently unfit. When mustered and assigned to their stations, the most inefficient of all were given places on deck in the middle part or waist of the ship. Here they were not called upon to go aloft or perform any more seamanlike duties than sweeping, pulling and hauling, and general menial work. A "waister" in short was an epithet of contempt, but implied nothing of the extravagance and non-productiveness with which, under its changed spelling, it is now associated.

At this point perhaps belongs the scornful New England estimate of an inefficient and generally negligible member of the community—"He don't amount to Hannah Cook." This is an easy corruption of "hand nor cook," and refers to a candidate for maritime honors,
who having been found of no value as a deck-hand, has been tried in the galley with equal lack of success, and is therefore, from the skipper's point of view, of no earthly — or rather watery — use whatever.

Many nautical terms in our common speech descend to us, as has been said, from those good old days that were in reality such bad old days. They are now obsolete in practice, and refer to almost forgotten customs and usages, so that the landlubber may be forgiven for his ignorance. The irate father who threatens to give his young hopeful "a keel-hauling" scarcely realizes the savage cruelty of that old punishment, where the wretched offender, stripped and bound, was slung at one end of the main-yard and hauled round to the other by means of a tackle, passing beneath the keel and emerging three parts drowned and frightfully lacerated from the sharp barnacles on the bottom of the hull. The famous piratical method of disposing of captives by guiding them blindfold along a plank extended over the vessel's side has given us the metaphor of making any undesirable "walk the plank." Another whiff of the Spanish Main is discernible in our frequent reference to the more merciful procedure of setting a victim ashore on a barren islet; so that any one isolated from his kind speaks of himself as "marooned." As for getting rid of captured craft, the favorite method of "scuttling" has left behind it a whole group of gloomy similes. In the days of flogging in the navy, the culprit was tied or "triced up" to a grating, and the phrase "in a trice" may bear witness to the incredible speed with which an old sea dog can handle cordage and make knots. Another ancient mode of confining an offender is recalled by the cant
phrase that you have your adversary "lashed to the mast."

What pictures of cut-throat smugglers of the olden times, watching for a chance to run their cargoes ashore, are called up by the announcement of your friend "on the look-out" that "the coast is clear!" (And for the benefit of the rising generation at the story-book stage it may be observed that a "lugger," that favorite craft of fiction, was not as slow and clumsy as her name suggests, but the fastest and handiest type of her time.) The memory of a well-known piratical ruse is perpetuated in the term "to show your colors," or your "true colors." For during a voyage—all marine paintings to the contrary—a vessel regularly wears no bunting, which would be whipped to ribbons in short order by Old Boreas. Only on meeting another craft or on entering harbor does she display her flag. If bound on no good errand she may either refuse to do so, or may decoy her prey by hoisting false colors. But at the critical moment, by a curious reversion to the fair play for which seamen have always been noted, she is traditionally bound to show her true colors—and woe betide the unfortunate merchant-man if she runs up the "Jolly Roger!"

In attempting a rough subject-classification of some further examples of sea terms in land speech we find a surprising number furnished by the ropes and rigging of a ship. The immovable or standing rigging contributes the "mainstay," that well-worn synonym for one's chief reliance, literally the principal rope staying or supporting the mainmast. The numerous pieces of movable or running rigging, which are made fast to rows of belaying-pins about the deck, occupy by long
custom the same relative positions on all vessels of the same rig, so that an "A.B." (Able-Bodied seaman), even if just come aboard, can lay hands instinctively on the right rope in the middle of the blackest night. For the greenhorn, however, the very first task is to memorize the whole system; hence the phrase "to know the ropes" implies exactly the feeling of familiarity and confidence for which it is commonly employed.

All ropes must be kept neatly coiled; there is nothing a good seaman despises more than to see "loose ends," the connotation of which for disorder and slackness has appealed to the landsman's fancy as well. We may suspect that the latter's complaint, often heard in these times of high prices, as to the difficulty of "making both ends meet," originated in the troubles of the economical sailor, struggling to lash up his chest or bundle with a piece of cordage which proves a little too short for the purpose.

Unless the end of a rope is securely whipped with twine, it will soon become "fagged out" into a tangled mass of yarns, as every housekeeper possessing a clothesline knows, and she often uses the metaphor to describe her own condition when thoroughly tired. Although a "fag end" would appear utterly valueless, yet on deep-water voyages all such scraps are saved to be worked over into small stuff. From the time of Columbus these worn-out oddments have been known as "junk," though the shore-going application of the word to similar scraps of metal, glass, etc., has nearly swallowed up all memory of its source. In the long uneventful days of a fine passage, when Satan must be circumvented by the usual means, the otherwise idle hands pick over this discarded
material and (literally) turn it into rope-yarn by a primitive spinning device: the long-drawn filaments have been immemorially associated with the equally long-drawn narratives accompanying their manufacture, so that both landsmen and seamen delight in “spinning a yarn.”

Before certain ropes of the running rigging can be hauled upon, it is necessary to “over-haul” them, that is, haul them over or down into position for use; the incidental examination and preparation that this implies has come to be the dominant element of the word, which now includes investigation and repairs of almost anything, from a liner to a lawn-mower. When a rope is running out too fast it can be controlled by taking a turn of it about the belaying-pin; if still more friction is required to stop it, a second or “round turn” is put on. “To bring up with a round turn” therefore expresses a pretty sudden and effectual check administered to one’s advancing adversary. Should the whole coil run out too soon, there is no greater feeling of despair for the man tending it, than to “come to the end of his rope,” and wonder what is to be done next.

Perhaps he may be able to tie another rope to it. About half the sailor’s knots are known as “hitches” of one sort or another: the word has acquired a wide and pervasive series of slang meanings, from the verb for marrying—also appropriately designated as “splicing”—to the substantive for a horse and carriage, or in the true Yankee vernacular a “rig” from the livery stable. The latter term itself bears quaint testimony to the seaman’s view of the operation of harnessing, formerly also spoken of as “tackling.” “Tackle” in turn has progressed
far afield in its compounds; starting with the perfectly legitimate "fishing tackle" we have now reached "shaving tackle," with no end apparently in sight. The proper nautical meaning is the familiar combination, in varying arrangements, of a rope and pullies, or "blocks," for gaining power in raising weights, etc. Tackles are also known as "purchases," whence comes the complaint, in trying to handle an unwieldy object, of the difficulty of "getting a purchase" on it. The trouble may be obviated if such an object is "turned end for end," the sailor's method of extending the life of a rope which has been worn out at one end, but is still good at the other.

The sails and their management have given us a large and interesting group of figures of common speech. Here as in many other branches of our subject we borrow largely from the complex nomenclature of the old square-rigger. Hence, for example, we obtain one of our most curious modern derivations, the "sky-scraper." Properly speaking, this is the small triangular sail, shaped not unlike the three-cornered scraping iron used for cleaning woodwork, etc., and hoisted in the finest weather at the very tip of the topmost mast—thus the sailor's epitome of loftiness. (Also dubbed moon-raker, star-chaser, etc.) The jib, one of the most prominent and characteristically shaped pieces of canvas in any type of rig, gives us the dubious expression, "I don't like the cut of his jib." This again recalls the old piratical days, and the anxious captain peering beneath his hand to scrutinize the strangely-rigged craft bearing down on him. The spanker, the heavy-weather sail at the opposite extremity of the vessel, is probably responsible for
the “spanking” breeze, an adjective of approbation transferred to horses, girls, and other excellent objects ashore.

In the handling of square sails, to “brace up” is to swing the yards into the position where the sails will get the best advantage from the wind and do the most efficient work: the adjuration is given to the lazy and ineffective mortal all over the Anglo-Saxon world. The over-prudent mariner, however, who is for ever trimming his sails to meet every puff, has given his name to the “trimmer” amid the conflicting winds of politics and intrigue. “Spreading sail” has furnished a number of metaphors, and the reverse operation of “furling” is also applied accurately enough to a large variety of terrestrial objects as dissimilar as battle-flags and umbrellas. In the face of a coming storm, either literal or figurative, the careful man “takes a reef,” or “takes in sail.” On the other hand, the reckless adventurer “carries sail” at all hazards. In racing, your rival may attempt to “get to windward” of you and thus “take the wind out of your sails” (or in the new idiom “puncture” you—still, it is to be observed, a question of air).

Now although anything that floats will sail “off” or “before the wind” (formerly called “going large”), the most difficult trick of navigation is to circumvent the obvious designs of nature by progressing as nearly as possible in the opposite direction. Of course a sailing vessel can not point right into “the wind’s eye,” so the result must be gained by a series of zig-zags or “tacks,” each as near the wind as the ship can go and at the same time keep her sails all full and drawing. This ticklish operation is known by a number of names, “going to windward,” “beating,” etc., while the ship is said to be
“by” or “on” or “close to” the wind. Nearly all these synonyms are found in landward speech. Thus a man pursuing a delicate or doubtful course of action is said to be “sailing pretty close to the wind.” While waiting or uncertain he “stands off and on,” i.e., sails off before the wind a little way and returns close-hauled on the wind. Another expression for indecision is “backing and filling,” calling up in finely picturesque fashion the mountain of canvas alternately forging slowly ahead and falling majestically astern, as the sails are allowed to fill or are thrown back against the masts. A general statement is often prefaced by the phrase, “taking it by and large,” as if considering a ship’s performances on all points of sailing. The nice adjustment of tacks to reach a desired position to windward requires much judgement, and a blunderer is said to be “on the wrong tack.” To progress directly against the wind can be done only by “a dead beat,” the most tiresome manœuvre in all seamanship; the term in the converse has been transferred to the poor wretch who has grown tired of the struggle to advance, and is content to drift with the storm.

Another group of well-known phrases is connected with the anchors and the cables. The popular conception of a “sheet anchor,” for instance, is about the same as a “main-stay.” The word is a corruption of shoot anchor—reserved to be shot overboard in a sudden emergency. The anchors carried on the bow for ordinary use are naturally the bowers, and the “best bower” has assumed a similar importance when found, appropriately enough, in a “deck” of cards. After an anchor has been dropped, the first question to be determined is
the length of cable that shall be given it, considering the depth of water, the bottom, the weather, the state of the tide, etc. This length is technically termed "scope," and since it forms the radius of the circle in which the ship swings, gives rise to such expressions as "within (or beyond) his scope," and the like. Having paid out the scope, the cable is checked by a stopper, a short strong rope with one end fast to a deck bolt. "To put a stopper on" one's opponent, therefore, is equivalent to bringing him up with a round turn. This method of securing the cable is but temporary, while the more permanent hitches are being adjusted around the bitts or stout posts in the deck. The extreme end of the cable, for the sake of precaution, is also fastened to the bitts, and thus forms the "bitter end," the principal component in a number of phrases probably as much misunderstood as any in the language.

If one anchor seems insuffcient, a second is put out near by, and the vessel is said to be "moored" between them. To recover both is a matter so cumbersome that in an emergency it is not attempted; the seaman cuts the cable, or "slips his moorings," and sails away without them. (Compare the colloquial "cut and run for it," and the less elegant "cut your hook" — the anchor being everywhere affectionately denominated the mud-hook.) If anchored in an exposed position with a gale coming on, the forehanded commander will probably "lay an anchor to windward," an example metaphorically followed by his imitators on land.

The ship's boats also must not be forgotten. The smallest of all, the now obsolete "cock-boat," was likewise called the "cockle-shell," under which name it
figures to-day in poetic diction. The officious passenger who tries to assist the regular rowers by “putting in his oar” has passed into a proverb on land. As a sailor does not row, but pulls, we have the expressive locution “a long (or hard) pull” for continued illness, financial difficulties, or other struggle against the tide of events. To prevent fatigue in such cases, the crew are occasionally allowed to “lay (or rest) on their oars,” a familiar figure for any pause in effort. The confused eddies which the oars leave behind them are known as “back water,” not a little troublesome for another boat following; hence the angry refusal “to take back water” from any one. Even on a country pond one may hear a boat is propelled by “a white ash breeze” in jocular allusion to the material of the oars. The rustic sport of “rocking the boat” has very properly become a synonym for foolhardy conduct likely to overturn an enterprise. Here we may animadvert on the extraordinary verdancy of the painters of historical boat-scenes, who delight to represent their principal character, or group of characters, as standing up in the boat — the position of greatest possible danger. From the seaman’s practical point of view, Washington crossing the Delaware, if correctly depicted, was a criminal idiot, and the Pilgrims coming ashore at Plymouth were a pack of lunatics.

The phraseology employed in steering and pilotage is the basis of some of the most familiar turns of English tongues. Although no officer ever takes the wheel, the political orator delights to place his hero “at the helm” of the ship of state — a vessel which at his hands invariably suffers from a complication of nautical disorders. To “lay out a course” of action, to “keep on the
course,” and to “steer a straight course” among conflicting interests, are all borrowed from common phrases of the chart-room. “To steer clear of” and “to shear off from” an undesirable acquaintance are about the same as to give him “a wide berth.” When the helmsman has thrown the tiller as far to one side as it will go, it is said to be “hard up,” and nothing further can be done; by some occult transfer the term has been applied to the impecunious individual who has no remaining resources. If sailing in any other direction than straight before the wind, every vessel makes a certain amount of side-slip or leeway which must be allowed for, so “to give a little leeway” to your impulsive friend is entirely natural.

The simplest method of coastwise pilotage is to steer by some prominent object or mark on shore—the familiar “landmark” (for there are sea-marks as well). A more accurate mode is to get two such marks in line, called a bearing; the mariner who has “lost his bearings” is as much to be pitied as the unlucky wanderer who has suffered the same fate in his voyage through life. But the navigator’s real reliance is the compass, a piece of apparatus which with the chart and the anchor forms the maritime stock in trade of the average public speaker, and furnishes forth more mixed metaphors than he is aware of. North, east, south, and west are the “cardinal points,” a term also applied to the essentials of a discourse or a policy. With the exception of the fleur de lys marking the north, none of the thirty-two points on the compass-card bears any distinctive sign, so that an inexperienced helmsman, ordered to steer a certain course, may admit, “I don’t see the point”; and the confession is made with equal aptness by the mystified lis-
tener to a story or an argument. To rehearse in consecutive order the entire series of points, from north around to north again, is to "box the compass," a phrase likewise taken to describe an individual or an organization that, having swung through all possible phases of action or belief, has arrived at the starting place once more.

On a cruise where there have been few chances to take observations the navigator must rely upon dead reckoning, or the calculation of his position from the direction and distance run since last determining his place on the chart. If he is "out of his reckoning" the consequences may be even more serious for him than for his business prototype ashore. In approaching a strange coast he will soon "see how the land lies," and the tactful conversationalist will do the same. The corresponding phrase, to "get the drift" of a statement, comes from the problem in local pilotage, where the drift or current is an important factor in the reckoning; near some parts of the English coast the ship may be set out of her course as much as eighteen miles by a single tide. Another difficulty common in the Old World, where the entrances to most harbors are obstructed by bars or shoals, is responsible for the metaphor of "tiding over" a friend temporarily embarrassed; literally this is to get a deep draught vessel over the bar by taking advantage of high water. The chart, it may be noted, gives us another case of a phrase both misspelled and misunderstood. The large scale harbor-charts are drawn on the assumption that the minute fraction of the globe they represent is so nearly flat that it may be shown as a plane. On such a projection the course is laid off as a straight line, disregarding the niceties of spherical or great circle sailing, and naviga-
tion becomes an easy matter. A bewildered man emerging from his perplexities, therefore, may exclaim with the hunter that he is "out of the woods," or with the sailor that "everything is plane sailing now." The phrase in brief means that he is practically in harbor already. But he will write it down "plain," a hundred to one!

The important matter of determining the depth of water under the ship, again, has enriched the landsman's vocabulary. He "sounds" a friend for information, but cannot always "fathom" the replies. If he does elicit the basic facts, he considers that he has "struck bottom" at last. In a discussion he may find himself "getting into deep water." When entirely "out of his depth" he is indeed "all at sea," or as the skipper would say, "off soundings." The exclamation "Watch out!" is probably a slight corruption of the traditional warning cry of the deep-sea leadsman as he lets go his last coil of the sounding line. And in a momentary digression we may recall that the complicated system of marks on that line has given us our "Mark Twain."

The business of stowing the cargo below decks has also contributed a share of colloquialisms. The empty-headed fellow "needs ballast" as much as the empty ship. When such a ship is to be loaded, the first step is to cover the damp and dirty floor of the hold with a layer of straw, twigs, etc., known as "dunnage," the origin of the jocose simile for one's small personal belongings. The old traveller is as proud as the stevedore of making "good stowage" of such effects in his trunk. The meaning of "stowaway" is too well-known to need explanation. This may not be true of the word "man-handle," which primarily refers to the moving of heavy
cargo by mere brute force, when the usual mechanical aids are absent or cannot be applied; the citizen who has been "man-handled" by a gang of roughs, however, is in no mood for the explanation. The nomenclature of stevedoring, by the way, has originated two designations now adopted in many other occupations for helpers who do the heavier and more elementary work: a "lumper," properly speaking, is the hand who makes up the cargo on the wharf into parcels which the "striker" lowers, or in technical language "strikes below" into the hold, where it is tightly packed by the more experienced men. This brings us to the fine old Down East hyperbole for a space so crowded that there is "not room to swing a cat." Perhaps we have here a picture of the hard old days of flogging, with the boatswain flourishing his terrible cat-o'-nine-tails; or, as bluejackets never go to bed, but "swing" in their hammocks, closely slung in rows beneath the deck beams, we may have the quaint simile of such a squeeze that even our feline friend could not find a place for her proverbial nap.

A large number of every-day metaphors is easily traceable to the various forms of disaster at sea. An unsuccessful enterprise "founders," or "goes to the bottom," or "on the rocks," or to the mythical "Davy Jones's locker" that is spoken of as glibly in Peoria as in Penzance. One craft occasionally "falls foul of" another by accident, but as a trope the implication is usually that of deliberate "collision." A man as well as a ship may become a "wreck" or a "derelict," or "stranded" on a foreign shore—in the worst circumstances "left high and dry" when the tide of fortune recedes. "Hard and fast" refers primarily to the condition of a
vessel thus immovably aground, but the absolute rigidity of the connotation has passed to any unyielding rule or line of demarcation. If a wreck is in such a position that the seas “make a clean sweep” over her, the masts and upper works will probably “go by the board” (board being used in its mediæval meaning of the ship’s side, as in _overboard_, etc.); the phrase is often used for any concern that has “gone to wrack (wreck) and ruin.”

A craft that strikes in full career with all sail set is “brought up all standing,” which vividly expresses the effect of shock and surprise on one who suddenly hears unexpected news. A like metaphor is to be “taken all aback,” or “flat aback,” referring to the dangerous accident of getting the wind on the wrong side of all the sails at once. Still another locution of the same import, “that took him between wind and water,” recalls the battle scene, and the staggering effect of a shot striking low down on the enemy’s hull, opening a rent alternately submerged and exposed as the vessel rolls, an awkward and perplexing _contretemps_. In a storm a ship is sometimes forced over so far on her side that her masts are parallel with the water and her deck beams are vertical; in this position she is “on her beams ends,” a simile most poignantly applied to an individual in the last extremity of desperation. And in social as well as naval encounters, one side may occasionally be observed “hoisting signals of distress.”

Sea clothing, again, has drifted ashore in considerable quantities—the “tarpaulin jacket” of the familiar songs, the precursor of our “oilers” or “slickers,” the “sou’wester” hat, and the short overcoat adapted to be worn aloft while reefing, and hence universally called a
"reefer." Conversely, Jack has borrowed most liberally from his sweetheart's wardrobe in the terminology of the construction and rigging of his ship, which among other things contains aprons, bibbs, bonnets, lacings, stays, pins, waists, breast-hooks, and fashion-pieces, while hoisting all the available flags for decoration is "dressing ship." He returns, however, to his own vocabulary when he beholds his girl "rigged out" for Sunday, and declares she is "a clipper," i.e. the smartest and handsomest type of sailing-vessel ever developed. And let it not be forgotten that his phrase for courting her, "keeping company," has been borrowed by his bucolic brother without realizing that it primarily refers to the ships of a squadron. In his own attire, too, he likes to be "shipshape," a word that has been taken up ashore in unconscious compliment to the neatness and cleanliness of the fine old full-riggers. It is an interesting historical note that the full phrase is "shipshape and Bristol fashion," taking us back to the days of long ago when London was a comparatively unimportant maritime center, and the town on the Severn—so much more accessible for sailing-vessels—was the most noted port of the English-speaking race. While on the subject of personal appearance it may be said that it was formerly considered a mark of great smartness in ship-building to "rake" or slope the masts heavily backwards, so that the adjective "rakish" still describes to perfection the ultra-jaunty young male. If forced by circumstances to go to bed with his clothes on, the countryman not infrequently makes use of the old salt's phraseology and "turns in all standing," i.e. with all sail set.

The fare of the forecastle, its "hard tack," "salt
horse,” “plum duff,” and so on, has also passed into the speech of thousands who could not tell a headsail from a handspike. Even the ship's biscuit, famed for its bullet-like hardness, has assumed a further projectile quality in the expression denoting close proximity, “within biscuit toss.”

Food leads on to drink, and opens a curious field in the matter of the sailor's picturesque euphemisms for intoxication. Some of them are very widely diffused and of great age. “Half seas over” goes back at least to the time of Dryden. It is really a poetical contraction for halfway over the seas, or midway between sobriety and total collapse. Much the same state is connoted by having “three sheets in the wind.” This applies literally to the moment while tacking a full-rigger when all three sets of sails are shaking helplessly in the breeze, so that she is, in equivalent shore slang, “paralyzed.” Again, when a tackle has been hauled up to its limit, so that the two pullies or blocks are close together with no space remaining, it is said to be “chock-a-block,” hence another and most vigorous term for repletion either in food or drink. The origin of the time-honored quip for standing a drink all round, “splicing the main brace,” seems lost in the sea-fogs of antiquity. This brings to mind that the ancient “grog,” or weak rum-and-water, generally obsolete except in convivial literature, is still retained both in name and nature by that highly conservative institution, the British Navy. Meantime, in America our most typical vessel, the “schooner,” has very properly ousted the German seinlo as a beer glass.

The disturbance of equilibrium consequent upon over liberal potations is described by the landsman in a variety
of sea terms. The reveller "carries a heavy list (leaning) to starboard." His zig-zag progress is aptly spoken of as "tacking," a word already explained. "To careen" is literally to roll the ship over until she exposes her keel (Latin *carina*). Similarly to "keel over" is to experience complete upset, while a lesser disaster is mentioned as a "capsize." While recovering the ability to advance "on an even keel" the patient is apt to be "cranky," an excellent use of the adjective specifically applied to a craft which handles badly and is unsteady in the water.

Perhaps it would be rash to assert that any nautical influence can be discovered in mankind's universal selection of the weather as a safe, sane, and perennially interesting topic of conversation. For the seaman above all others, it will be allowed nevertheless, the subject possesses a peculiarly vital importance. It is not surprising, then, that his weather talk has a far-reaching robustness that has carried much of it into the recesses of the five continents, to embellish the paler and more perfunctory platitudes of those who neither know nor particularly care whether they are experiencing a "sou'easter" or a "nor'wester." His observations, too, have necessarily been so extensive and discriminating that they have produced an enormous glossary, almost a weather language by itself. From this feast of good things the landsman has helped himself liberally. The patience of the reader, more politely known as the limits of this article, will hardly permit an examination of the countless weather saws and maxims wherein the "sailor" is represented as "delighting" or "taking warning" or performing sundry technical evolutions, nor of such figures as "things are looking squally," "business is in the doldrums," *et cetera*
ad infinitum. Yet it may be worth observing that the strictly maritime use of the adjective "weather side," or windward, and the verb "to weather," to get to windward, or more generally to make good weather of or survive, appears frequently in country speech. On the contrary, a struggling and unsuccessful person, or a devotee of Bacchus, is said to be "making heavy weather of it." The advice to "keep your weather eye open" has its full effect only upon the seaman. He alone knows the well-nigh irresistible tendency to close the eye against which the gale is driving the rain and spray, although it is from that side that danger is almost sure to come. The words really connote the very essence of watchful fortitude. The common locution for slight illness, "under the weather," probably refers to the tendency shown by any one thus afflicted on shipboard to huddle up in the shelter of the weather bulwarks. By the converse figure, to get "under the lee" of prominent persons or objects is often quite as advisable ashore as afloat.

The random illustrations here set down might be almost indefinitely extended by the researches of a deep-sea-going philologist, if such exists. Enough has been said, at all events, to show the tribute which modern colloquial English unconsciously pays to that life on the ocean wave which is the heritage and the safeguard of the race. Although most of this terminology is employed by nature rather than by art, the analytical soul may find an entertaining exercise in stopping midway of a sentence now and then to consider how much we land folk owe for raciness and picturesqueness of diction to our brethren of the sea.