ALDEN OF "HARPER'S," GENIAL LINK WITH LITERARY PAST

Veteran Editor, Still Active and Inspiring, Works in Little Cubbyhole Peopled With Ghosts of Warner, Wilkie Collins, Mark Twain and Others

IT is a little cubbyhole of an office about eight by twelve. As you peep into it you see two or three narrow bookshelves on the left near the door. At the right a single comfortable chair for a single visitor. At the further end an old fashioned window beyond which elevated trains pass and repass all day long. Between you and that window, in another chair, bending over a desk of the 1870 period, sits a tall man of large frame reading a manuscript—a story he has just received from Howells, perhaps, or an exquisite picture of New England life from Dorothy Canfield; possibly a poem from Josephine Preston Peabody, a tale of the sea sent him by Joseph Conrad, or, as is often the case, a first effort by some unknown who has felt the writing impulse so strongly that it could not be resisted.

Whatever it may be, manuscript from famous authors or from authors who hope to be famous some day, proof sheets or letters laid before him for signature, everything receives careful attention from this silent man with snowy hair and snowy beard and ruddy cheeks, whose "gypsy eyes," as Margaret Deland has called them, still hold their fire and depth, although those eyes first saw light of day nearly eighty years ago.

It is a plain little office, with bare floor, in which sits Henry M. Alden, the editor of *Harper's Magazine*, but to a host of men and women, novelists, essayists, historians, painters, explorers, scientists, poets, it is a shrine made glorious by the presence of its presiding spirit. On the wall hangs a portrait of Howells at 50, when he had written "The Rise of Silas Lapham." Near by is a smaller picture of Charles Dudley Warner. They are all that are visible, but if the walls and floor furniture of that cubbyhole could speak the world might have echoes of literary conferences and confidences as well which it would cherish long and jealously.

Wilkie Collins, Justin McCarthy, Mark Twain, Howells, Gilbert Parker, Owen Wister, Mrs. Deland, Abbey, Sargent, Howard Pyle—a volume might be filled with names of those who have come into this tiny office since 1869, when Mr. Alden assumed the editorship of *Harper's*. And none have left it, veterans or raw recruits, without renewed inspiration to do their very best in the art they worshipped.

For a matter of forty years or so Mr. Alden resided at Metuchen, N. J., travelling daily to and from his office in Franklin Square. More recently he has been spending the winter months in town; but years do not count with perennial spirits; and instead of taking a train above ground nowadays he merely takes a subway express. It's all the same, excepting that the subway saves time; and there is so much to be done in this wonderful young world that time must be a consideration, even to a philosopher.

He was speaking the other day of men and women and books when reference was made to a suggestion recently put forth by another and younger editor of a magazine to the effect that a foundation might well be formed to endow with moderate incomes some of those who are now struggling for a livelihood and at the same time trying as best they may to produce literature of serious worth.

"I think," said Mr. Alden, with his habitual gentleness, "that the value of doing so would depend upon peculiar exigencies in the case of one struggling to help himself or herself. Hitherto there has been need for such partial endowment in certain instances of authorship. Of this there can be little doubt among those familiar with the situation. Still, I do not think that leisure in a general way, that is, unlimited leisure, is at all necessary to literary work or success.

"The prompting is within; and the writer who has genius usually has not only the courage but the buoyancy of his endeavors and prefers to accomplish his destiny himself. The cases in which benefactions are really necessary are very rare. The man having unmistakable genius usually succeeds.

"It must not be forgotten, however, that the Authors Club has a fund which in many an instance has helped authors and their families to tide over a period of serious emergency. And this aid by fellow craftsmen is given so quietly that the Authors Club members themselves do not know who are the beneficiaries.

"I am not sure that it is easier now to obtain a salaried position on the staff of a periodical or with a publishing house than it was, say, fifty years ago, or as easy. The number of periodicals and of publishers has multiplied, of course, but the number of literary workers also has increased enormously. Yet the author not seeking employment at regular salary, the man or the woman who earns a living by writing, has far greater opportunities than ever before to sell manuscripts and at a higher price than formerly.

"The change in fiction written since the '80s is greater, I think, than the change in any other of the arts. To-day fiction is direct and natural, truer to life than ever before. We also see a corresponding change in oratory. Its theatrical investiture of former years has almost wholly passed away."

"That is one field, the field of fiction, where women have full freedom with men," suggested the visitor.

"Yes," Mr. Alden assented, "and in modern fiction, since the social novel came in with Richardson, women have showed unmistakable genius in the portrayal of life. They have portrayed life much more intimately than the contemporary male novelist. Since the time of Fanny Burney, who was so much admired by Dr. Johnson, women have been taking a larger place in fiction, but they have handled all the elements differently from men—as Miss Radcliffe is different from Poe in the treatment of mystery, for example.

"Maria Edgeworth, contemporary with Fanny Burney, also was among the first of women to adventure in fiction. She shared Scott's admiration for Jane Austen, and he placed their work above his own, although they did not have what he termed 'the Big Bowwow style.'

"Coming down to our own country and more recent times, one may recall Elizabeth Stoddard's early novel, 'The Morgensons,' which, like her other work, was characterized by uncommon strength as compared with that of other women of her time. Mrs. Stoddard's novels at any rate were free of sentimentality, which was the vice of romantic literature of that time."

"Do you remember the first manuscript you accepted for publication in *Harper's?*"

Mr. Alden's eyes sparkled with enjoyment.

"I remember distinctly the first manuscript I ever read for *Harper's Magazine*," he said, "although I did not then have authority to accept it. At the time, the summer of 1863, I was assisting Dr. Guernsey, then the editor, and the first manuscript I took up happened to be a short love story by Louise Chandler Moulton."

This contribution Mr. Alden stamped with his approval and it was accepted. From that day his responsibilities increased and six years later he gave up the office management of *Harper's Weekly* to succeed Dr. Guernsey as chief of the magazine.

HENRY M. ALDEN.

Long before that time, when he was teaching school in New York and contributing occasional articles to the daily newspapers, he wrote and sent to the *Atlantic Monthly* some articles on the structure of paganism. They fell into the hands of James T. Fields, who took them with him to Europe; and when he came back from abroad Mr. Fields set about finding Mr. Alden here in New York. At last he succeeded and invited him to dinner, placing him at the right hand of Mrs. Fields, then in the prime of her youth, who talked delightfully about Dickens, Tennyson, the Brownings and other distinguished authors she had recently met in Europe.

When Mr. Alden took his leave from that hospitable gathering Mr. Fields accompanied him to the hallway, praised the articles Mr. Alden had sent to the *Atlantic* and then placed in his hands $300 on account. Lowell, Emerson and Wendel Phillips also had read the articles and were so impressed by them that Mr. Alden—then 26 or 27 years old—was invited to deliver a course of twelve lectures before the Lowell Institute in Boston.

"It was then," he says, "at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Fields that I met Hawthorne and Emerson—Emerson spending the night there."

Shortly after this experience Mr. Alden accepted an editorial appointment in Franklin Square and there he has remained to this day. He has had many experiences with authors, some of them amusing.

Once when Justin McCarthy was in this country he called at the Harpers, and during a chat "the genius of the firm," the late Fletcher Harper, asked him to write some short stories for the magazine.

"How many do you want?" asked McCarthy.

"Oh, say forty-five," Mr. Harper replied.

After the visitor had gone Mr. Harper told Mr. Alden of the occurrence, and both hoped that Mr. McCarthy would send a few stories at least. They were not disappointed in this.

"As a matter of fact," says the veteran editor, "Justin McCarthy accepted the order in all seriousness. He wrote every one of those forty-five stories, and we were glad to get them. Furthermore, unless I am mistaken he wrote them all before he had concluded his visit to the United States. He was the readiest short story writer I ever knew."

When Mr. Alden first took charge of *Harper's Magazine* and for a good many years afterward he was editor and everything else. He opened the editorial mail, entered all the manuscripts in a book, read them all, accepting and declining, laid out the magazine number by number, read all the proofs, carried on with his own pen a vast and varied correspondence with writing folk all over the world and never lost a manuscript but once, it is said.

According to the story, one of the most widely known of American novelists years ago sent a story to the magazine, and not hearing from it in due time ventured to make an inquiry. Mr. Alden remembered the story perfectly and started to look for it. Before long others were called into the search. Every nook and cranny was examined, but without avail.

Finally a clerk called attention to the fact that mice had been around the editor's little office. Whereupon Mr. Alden wrote the author asking whether he had a copy of the contribution, and receiving an affirmative reply, immediately sent a second letter explaining that the very mice of Franklin Square were so appreciative of good literature that they had ravenously consumed his original copy, and would he please send a duplicate?

As the duties of editorial work increased with the development of magazine publication Mr. Alden found it necessary to employ assistance, for no single person was physically capable of handling the details that grew by leaps and bounds. But in selecting his reader of manuscripts he has always been exceedingly careful and of such specialists he has had not more than four or five since he took charge of *Harper's* away back in 1869.

"The most important work connected with a magazine," he has often said, "is that of judgment in connection with manuscripts submitted day after day. The professional reader who first sees them in very large measure determines the future of the periodical, for upon that reader rests the initial responsibility of declining offered contributions from unknown authors—and every magazine of general literature and wide appeal is dependent not so much upon the authors who have already distinguished themselves as upon the young men and young women who will be the distinguished authors of to-morrow. A careless or incompetent reader easily could decline manuscripts not wholly suitable perhaps, but having somewhere within them the spark of genius which needs encouragement, guidance and patient culture."

Holding this view from the first, Mr. Alden has made it an invariable rule that his assistants should never of their own responsibility decline manuscripts unless convinced that they were wholly unavailable for *Harper's*. Furthermore, these professional readers have been under strict injunction to lay before the editor any and every manuscript, whether or not available, provided it showed real promise on the part of its author. In consequence Mr. Alden has examined every day possibly from six to a dozen or more contributions offered by unknown writers.

And if tales which are true could be told many a man and many a woman to-day holding high rank in contemporary authorship would express gratitude for the advice and encouragement received in past years from this wise, far seeing editor. Often such a struggling author would continue to send manuscripts to Franklin Square for several years before arriving at the workmanlike quality which means acceptance, and these fortunate young people kept on writing, kept on submitting their stories, poems, essays, simply because of the brief but clairvoyant notes that came back to them with each declined contribution.

Of recent years schools have been organized to teach the art of story writing by correspondence courses. But one of the most successful correspondence schools of practical literary work ever conducted has been carried on as a matter of love and duty from that cubbyhole office down in Franklin Square for nearly half a century.

Mr. Alden has one saying that may seem strange to the average reader, even to the average author.

"Every manuscript that comes to this office either accepts itself or declines itself. In this part of his work an editor merely registers the decision."

In other words, if the story or the poem, the scientific paper, the essay, or other offering, is up to the standard in quality and treatment it commands acceptance, otherwise it commands declination.

At certain times there is in most magazine offices a dearth of manuscripts of one kind or another. The present famine in good short stories has lasted for several years, and seems destined to continue, notwithstanding increased prices paid by nearly all American periodicals.

A decade ago, for example, many a writer of excellent stories was content to receive from $150 to $200 for each manuscript. To-day some of those authors, still young and buoyant in the literary sense, are being paid from $300 to $500; and one man—he is an exception, to be sure—recently stated that his present price for a story running between 5,000 and 7,000 words is $700. Furthermore, he adds, he has sold in advance of writing them all the short stories he can possibly produce during the coming year.

But Mr. Alden has never allowed himself to be bothered by an apparent shortage in any kind of manuscripts, although this may not be truly said of some of his more apprehensive associates.

"*Harper's* has been coming out month by month for fifty years or more," he has remarked, "and it will keep coming out regularly every thirty days for a long time to come." Then, with a twinkle in his eyes, he would continue: "Don't be anxious—and don't forget that a particular little spirit is ever hovering over the editorial rooms here, and will look out for the supply of manuscripts."

At one time *Harper's* was publishing serially a romance by a very distinguished author who was delivering it in monthly parts. As soon as a new instalment was received it was at once put in type and a proof was forwarded to the illustrator.

Four weeks went by, and five, without a word as to the next instalment. At the end of the fifth week word came that the author had been very ill and was just on the turning point toward recovery. At that something akin to consternation was felt in certain parts of Franklin Square; but not in the cubbyhole, where all remained calm and serene.

What could be done? Day after day went by, and it was feared that an announcement would have to be made of the author's illness so that readers who had been following the story would not be too deeply disappointed.

"There's no need of worry as yet," said Mr. Alden. "How long a time have we before the next instalment really must be put in type?"

"Forty-eight hours," was the reply.

"All right; then we'll wait until an hour after to-morrow. By that time our little editorial sprite will come to our assistance—see if he doesn't!"

Mr. Alden laughed as he said this and started for Metuchen. The next day he stayed there, quietly writing his "Editor's Study." But the day following he came to the office as usual and found awaiting him the delayed instalment of the romance. This kind of thing happened so often in various ways that it is said some of the old timers in Franklin Square occasionally catch themselves wondering whether Mr. Alden's fanciful idea of an editorial sprite may not be based on something more than fancy after all.

To the world at large Mr. Alden of *Harper's* is "the great, grave scholarly man" of profound knowledge, unerring insight and literary judgment, all but infallible. To a host of authors, artists, who have reason to know him well, he is the gentlest, the strongest, the most sympathetic of natures. A little incident that happened more than a dozen years ago illustrates his kindliness and his complete simplicity.

One morning he was a little delayed in leaving his home at Metuchen, but hurried out of the house to enter a carriage which was waiting to take him to the railway station. As he passed quickly across the sidewalk he collided with a laboring man who was engaged in digging a trench. Just before the moment of impact Alden spoke a word of sharp warning in the hope that the other would spring aside.

Nothing more was thought of it by the laborer, who merely went on with his long handled shovel. But all the way to New York it worried Mr. Alden. He could not bear to think that he had hurt the feelings of the man—and of course he hadn't. But an hour or so after reaching Franklin Square he tried to work, but could not. Then he went out and wrote a telegram to a member of his family in Metuchen mentioning the incident and asking her to find the workman and explain how sorry Mr. Alden was that he had spoken hastily. When the message was signed the editor of *Harper's* returned to his desk with a lightened heart and worked like a trojan.

BRAVE DAYS OF THE CLIPPER SHIPS RECALLED BY AGED SKIPPER

Capt. Urquhart, Hale and Hearty at 74, Recounts His Experiences on the Heaving Deck of a Full Rigged Ship on the Run Between New York and Liverpool

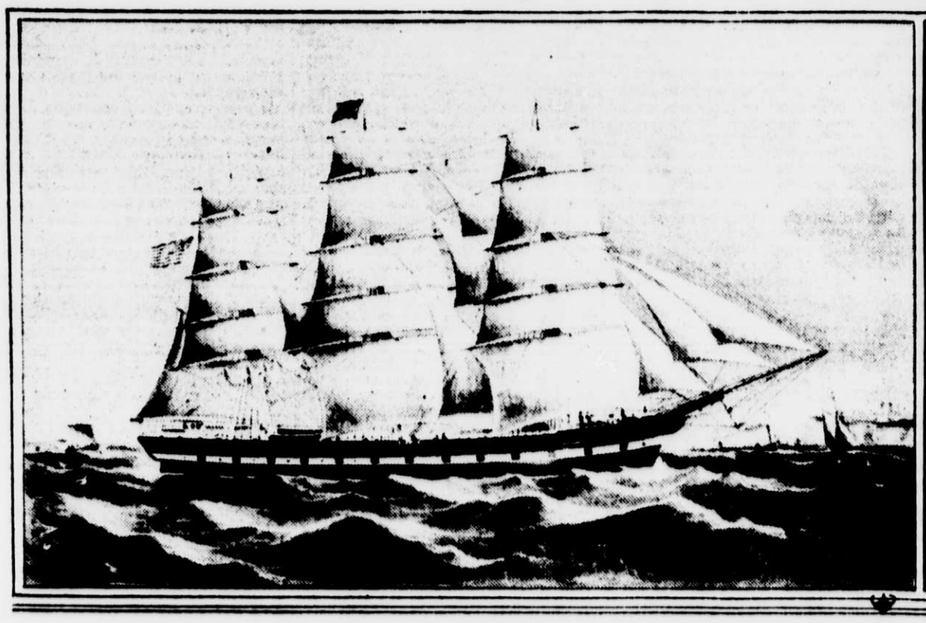
CAPT. URQUHART, hale and hearty at 74, glances at the ship's barometer in his private cabin and instinctively cocks his head a little to one side, listening for the wind which should be howling through cordage far above. Then from long habit he pauses to note the straining of his ship's timbers as she valiantly makes her way through half a gale.

A moment later he chuckles appreciatively and comes forward to greet a visitor from THE SUNDAY SUN, for as a matter of fact there is no ship with creaking timbers this February afternoon, nor is there any whistling cordage nearer than the waterfront half a mile away. Capt. Urquhart, one of the few old time commanders of full rigged ships still alive, is merely pacing the floor of his residence at 142 Hicks street, Brooklyn.

But the cabin is there, at any rate; a room on the ground floor opening at the rear of the captain's library, with his single bed at one side, a few other articles of furniture such as a master mariner needs at sea, the barometer aforementioned, and several nautical instruments that come in handy on occasion. Of course Capt. Urquhart could have his sleeping quarters upstairs if he wanted to, for it is a large, roomy dwelling. But he has spent so much of his life on deep water that he rests better when his bed isn't too far up in the air. Besides, if anything should go wrong—quite unexpectedly, mind you—there he would be, ready to spring out from between the blankets at a moment's notice and take instant command; on deck, as it were, in a jiffy and without having to consume valuable seconds in running down two or three flights of stairs or sliding down the banister.

White haired and ruddy of face is the captain, full of snap and vigor as he paces rapidly to and fro, his keen blue eyes alight with fire, his words spoken crisply, while he talks about the '60s when he commanded packets plying between New York and London, some of them carrying as many as 700 or 800 passengers. On the walls of the drawing room, just beyond the library, hang oil paintings of ships, and he halts in front of one.

"Take this, for example," he says; "the William Tapscott, full rigged, as you see. She was owned by E. E. Morgan & Sons of New York, and they put me in command of her in 1869, the year I was 30. We carried 800 passengers on her, and it took us twenty-three days to go eastward from New York to London and thirty-five to come west. This was because the prevailing winds were westerly and the seas were always against us when we were coming west. The London packets of those days carried four classes of passengers and the fares were as follows: First cabin, $90; second cabin, $30; intermediate, $25, and steerage, $20.



The William Tapscott of the Black X line under all sail off Dover in 1869.

London packet American Eagle in a furious gale off the coast of Ireland in 1862.

"We estimated that it cost us 20 cents a day to feed each of the steerage passengers and it was rather poor food that they got too. But you must remember that the bill of fare was all planned out by the British Government and in general we were compelled to follow its instructions. We had to, for British Government inspectors were men who really inspected, not only the food itself but the quarters of crew and passengers, the fire hose, water supply, boats and everything else you can imagine.

"But the Tapscott wasn't my first command. The first ship I ever commanded was the full rigged American Eagle, built by Jacob Westervelt here at New York, and I took command near the end of the year 1861. I was only 23 then, remember, hardly older than the average sophomore is in college today, and you can understand that it was no small responsibility.

"We sailed on a regular schedule—on Thursdays—from the East River, foot of Pine or Wall street, for London. There was a good complement of passengers aboard when we started on my first voyage in command. We had more than a taste of midwinter weather on the way and it got worse and worse until one night in January when I sat alone in the saloon wondering what was going to happen and whether by any chance or good seamanship we could pull through.

"The American Eagle was laboring and straining, fighting her way through a gale and every soul on board knew we were in great danger, although none but myself understood that our situation was almost desperate.

"I sat there in the saloon, poring over a chart, above my head a compass and within easy reach my sailing directions—I mean the Bible," Capt. Urquhart explained with all simplicity. "You see I had been converted in the great revival of 1857 and since then I had proved to myself that these sailing directions were authoritative and final. That's why I've always kept them close by ever since.

"Well, as I sat there studying the chart I knew that we were within half a dozen miles of the ironbound coast of Ireland and that we were drifting toward it at the rate of about two miles an hour. That meant that unless something happened we would be driven ashore and smashed to pieces in three hours or four at the most. It's a pretty serious thing for a man to realize that death is coming in a few hours, especially a man as young as I was then, with his whole life practically before him.

"I was thinking of this when into the saloon came the ship's carpenter, so frightened that he could hardly speak. I asked him if water was gaining on the pumps and he replied, 'Captain, I'm sorry to say it is.'

"Then I said, 'Don't be alarmed, carpenter, we'll get out of it.' You see, it wasn't the leak I feared so much as being smashed on that coast, and to keep the crew from being panic stricken I hadn't told any one the position of the ship. A moment or two later I spoke to carpenter again.

"'You're a good Baptist,' I said—for he had shipped many years with my father in his commands, and I knew all about the man. 'You're a good Baptist,' I said, 'and I'm a believer in the Bible. Now, carpenter, suppose we see what the Bible says, if anything, about situations like this.'

"I reached over and took up my Bible," Capt Urquhart continued, "and opened it at random. My finger pointed to the 107th Psalm, and I read it out loud. 'Here it is,' he continued, picking up a worn and much used copy of the Bible and turning without difficulty to the passage. 'You see the verses are marked—not that I'd ever forget them, but so others might understand. Listen.'

And the Captain of 74 stood up, and in an impressive voice read to his caller passages about those that go down to the sea in ships, emphasizing the verses from 27 to 31. Then he laid aside his "sailing directions," and continued the story.

"Carpenter stood very quiet listening to me. I closed the book, and happened to look aloft at the compass. I took a second look, and said, 'Don't you feel a little lull in the storm, carpenter?' He thought a moment and said, 'I do.' I said, 'The sleet has gone off four points, the wind has changed and we're out of danger.'

"And what I told carpenter was true," added Capt. Urquhart.

Later on when the captain was at Queenstown he looked up an artist and said he wanted a painting of that eventful night off the Irish coast, so he sat down and gave the painter a minute description of every detail of ship and storm. To this time the artist finished his painting in oils, and to this day it hangs in the drawing room of 142 Hicks street. He permitted a photograph of the picture to be made for THE SUNDAY SUN. In it the American Eagle is seen labouring under two close reefed topsails in that January gale just before the carpenter went below and reported that water was gaining on the pumps. Capt. Urquhart was so certain to have a true representation of his ship that he insisted that the artist draw every line to scale, one inch to the foot.

"And it was done so exactly," the Captain declares, "that you could cut the sails by that scale."

Another interesting story of the sea that he recalls is that of a rocket on a run from Liverpool to New York.

"When about six hundred miles from New York," he avers, "this ship became so leaky that she was in a sinking condition. The captain said to the men that were pumping: 'If the water continues to gain on the pumps as it does now we will all be in eternity before morning. I am going below to pray; does any one wish to join me?' None of the sailors spoke up and said, 'You pray, captain, and we'll pump.' And they did.

"Strange to say, an hour later the pumps won the race, and were finally sucked dry. After that it required only a little extra pumping to keep the ship free. Everybody was surprised, but none more than the captain. He always declared, however, that his praying did it.

"The ship, after arriving in New York, went on the dry dock for repairs, and it was discovered that a strip of seaweed two feet long had been sucked into a seam where the oakum had worked out. The seaweed stopped the leak and saved the ship."

Capt. Urquhart paused in his walk around the room, silently reflecting for a moment. Then he continued:

"I don't want you to give readers of THE SUNDAY SUN an idea that I'm particularly religious man, for I'm not; only I've spent so many years and I've been in so many situations where that I learned long ago that my sailing directions is the best to follow. I'm no saint, I can't say that in my early days as a lad I was very wicked. Those were the rough tumble days at sea, and I was so wicked that I was ready to fight any man in the crew on almost any provocation. But that changed with the great revival of 1857.

"Young folks of today have no least idea of what that revival was or how far it swept across the continent, and beyond, for that matter. It seemed as if time and again ships would come in with their entire crews having been converted during a voyage. I remember distinctly what happened in the spring of '57 when I was second mate of the famous London packet ship, Capt. Lord.

"Just before then I had been converted while at sea. And when I came ashore again I was really interested in the wave that was spreading. It seemed to sweep everybody.

"At the suggestion of Wall Street prayer meeting a man was appointed for every block in the country to stop work on the clock exactly on the stroke of one o'clock noon and hold a prayer meeting for an appointed hymn. I happened to be on Broadway at that hour and the clocks rang out 12 and on the sidewalks, at the doors and wagons on the streets of the Broadway stages, people stood absolutely still while the swelled up into the air, hundreds of thousands of voices singing it all over the land.

"Later on I went down to the office of Pine street to report for duty as officer of the Devonshire. A long time before that, although at the time I was only 18 or 19. And I had not been aboard long enough to say that for sure. But before I boarded I stopped long enough to put my packets in a pair of brass knuckles. The next day they were tossed into the sea off the dock at Pine street. I know they were on their way to the bottom.

"Another thing, I never swore and never needed to. As a matter of fact, even during my years of commanding ships I was armed. I carried a pistol and the suggestion of it was enough.

"But that," said Capt. Urquhart, "must have looked funny. I being a little fellow and being provided with a pistol as big as my arm. But I had a full crew of mutiny on my hands."