

TWIN'S TALES.

Rambling Notes of an Idle Excursion by Water.

How a Guileless and Simple-Minded Yankee came it over his Brother in a Grave-Yard Transaction.

The Skipper and the Governor—A Rescue at Sea—The Chronometer of God.

(Mark Twain, in the October Atlantic.)

All the journeyings I had done had been purely in the way of business. The pleasant May weather suggested a novelty, namely, a trip for pure recreation, the bread-and-butter element left out. The reverend said he would go, too; a good man, one of the best of men, although a clergyman. By 11 at night we were in New Haven and on board the New York boat. We bought our tickets, and then went wandering around here and there, in the solid comfort of being free and idle, and of putting distance between ourselves and the mails and telegraph.

After a while I went to my stateroom and undressed, but the night was too enticing for bed. We were moving down the bay now, and it was pleasant to stand at the window and take the cool night breeze and watch the gliding lights on shore. Presently two elderly men sat down under that window and began a conversation. Their talk was properly no business of mine, yet I was feeling friendly toward the world and willing to be entertained. I soon gathered that they were brothers; that they were from a small Connecticut village, and that the matter in hand concerned the cemetery. Said one:—

"Now, John, we talked it all over amongst ourselves, and this is what we've done. You see everybody was a-movin' from the old buryin' ground, and our folks was most about left to themselves, as you may say. They was crowded, too, as you know; lot wa'n't big enough in the first place; and last year, when Seth's wife died, we couldn't hardly tuck her in. She sort o' overlaid Deacon Shorb's lot, and he soured on her, so to speak, and on the rest of us, too. So we talked it over, and I was for a lay-out in the new simitery on the hill. They wa'n't unwilling, if it was cheap. Well, the two best and biggest plots was No. 8 and No. 9,—both of a size; nice comfortable room for twenty-six,—twenty-six full grown, that is; but you reckon in children and shorts, and strike an average, and I should say you might lay in thirty, or may be thirty-two or three, pretty genteel,—no crowd'n to signify."

"That's a plenty, William. Which one did you buy?"

"Well, I'm a-comin' to that, John. You see, No. 8

was 'is; No. 9,

"I see. So's 't you took No. 8."

"You wait. I took No. 9; and I'll tell you for why.

In the first place, Deacon Shorb wanted it. Well, after the way he'd gone on about Seth's wife overlappin' his premises, I'd a beat him out of that No. 9, if I'd a had to stand two dollars extra, let alone one. That's the way I felt about it. Says I, what's a dollar, any way? Life's only a pilgrimage, says I; we ain't here for good, and we can't take it with us, says I. So I just dumped it down, knowin' the Lord don't suffer a good deed to go for nothin', and cal'latin' to take it out o' somebody in the course o' trade. Then there was another reason, John. No. 9's a long way the handiest lot in the simitery, and the likeliest for situation. It lays right on top of a knoll, in the dead centre of the buryin' ground; and you can see Millport from there, and Tracy's and Hopper Mount, and a raft o' farms, and so on. There ain't no better outlook from a buryin' plot in the State. Si Higgins says so, and I reckon he ought to know. Well, and that ain't all. Course, Shorb had to take No. 8; wan't no help for't. Now, No. 8 jines on to No. 9, but it's on the slope of the hill, and every time it rains it'll soak right down on to the Shorbs. Si Higgins says 't when the deacon's time comes, he better take out fire and marine insurance both on his remains."

Here there was the sound of a low, placid, duplicate chuckle of appreciation and satisfaction.

"Now, John, here's a little, rough draft of the ground, that I've made on paper. Up here in the left-hand corner we've bunched the departed; took them from the old grave-yard and stowed them, one alongside o' t'other, on a first-come-first-served plan, no partialities, with gran'ther Jones for a starter, on'y because it happened so, and windin' up indiscriminate with Seth's twins. A little crowded toward the end of the lay-out, may be, but we reckoned 't wan't best to scatter the twins. Well, next comes the livin'. Here, where it's marked A, wer'e goin' to put Mariar and her family, when they're called; B, that's for brother Hosea and his'n; C, Calvin and tribe. What's left is these two lots here, just the gem of the whole patch for general style and outlook; they're for me and my folks, and you and yourn. Which of them would you rather be buried in?"

"I swan, you've took me maghty unexpected, William. It sort of started the shivers. Fact is, I was thinkin' so busy about makin' things comfortable for the others, I hadn't thought about being buried myself."

"Life's on'y a flectin' show, John, as the sayin' is. We've all got to go, sooner or later. To go with a clean

record's the main thing. Fact is, it's the on'y thing worth strivin' for, John."

"Yes, that's so, William, it's so; there ain't no gettin' around it. Which of these lots would you recommend?"

"Well, it depends, John. Are you particular about outlook?"

"I don't say I am, William. I don't say I aint. Reely, I don't know. But mainly, I reckon, I'd set store by a south exposure."

"That's easy fixed, John. They're both south exposure. They take the sun, and Shorbs get the shade."

"How about sile, William?"

"D's a sandy sile; E's mdy loom."

"You may gimme E, then, William; a sandy sile caves in, more or less, and costs for pairs."

"All right; set your name own here, John, under E."

Now, if you don't mind p'ntin' me your share of the \$14, John, while we're on the business, everything is fixed."

After some higgling and sharp bargaining, the money was paid, and John bade his other good-night, and took his leave. There was silence for some moments; then a soft chuckle welled up from the lonely William, and he muttered: "I declare for 't, I haven't made a mistake! It's D that's mostly loom; not E. And John's booked for a sandy sile arter all."

There was another soft chuckle, and William departed to his rest also.

The next day, in New York was a hot one. Still, we managed to get more or less entertainment out of it. Toward the middle of the afternoon, we arrived on board the staunch steamship *Bermuda*, with bag and baggage, and hunted for a shady place. It was blazing summer weather, until we were half way down the harbor. Then I buttoned my coat closely. Half an hour later I put on a spring overcoat, and buttoned that. As we passed the light-ship, I added an ulster and tied a handkerchief around the collar to hold it snuggly to my neck. So rapidly had the summer gone and winter come again!

By nightfall we were far out at sea, with no land in sight. No telegrams could come here, no letters, no news. This was an uplifting thought. It was still more uplifting to reflect that the millions of harassed people on shore behind us were suffering just as usual.

The next day brought us in the midst of the Atlantic solitudes—out of smoke-color soundings into fathomless deep blue. No ships visible anywhere over the wide ocean; no company but Mother Mary's chickens wheeling about in the sun. There were some sea-faring men among passengers, and conversation drifted into matters concerning ships and sailors. One said that "true as a needle to the pole" was a bad figure, since the needle seldom pointed to the pole. He said a ship's compass was not faithful to any particular point, but was the most fickle and treacherous of the servants of man. It was forever changing. It changed every day in the year. Consequently the amount of the daily variation had to be ciphered out and allowance made for it, else the mariner would go utterly astray. Another said there was a vast fortune waiting for the genius who should invent a compass that would not be affected by the local influences of an iron ship. He said there was only one creature more fickle than a wooden-ship's compass, and that was the compass of an iron ship. Then came reference to the well-known fact that an experienced mariner can look at the compass of a new iron vessel, thousands of miles from her birth-place, and tell which way her head was pointing when she was in process of building.

Now, an ancient whale-ship master fell to talking about the sort of crews they used to have in his early days. Said he:

"Sometimes we'd have a batch of college students. Queer lot. Ignorant? Why, they didn't know the cat-heads from the main-brace. But if you took them for fools, you'd get bit, sure. They'd learn more in a month than another man would in a year. We had one once, in the *Mary Ann*, that came aboard with gold spectacles on. And besides, he was rigged out from main-trunk to keelson in the nobbiest clothes that ever saw a fo'castle. He had a chest full, too; cloaks, and broadcloth coats, and velvet vests; everything swell, you know; and didn't the salt water fix them out for him? I guess not! Well, going to sea, the mate told him to go aloft, and help shake out the fore-to-gallants! Up he shins to the foretop, with his spectacles on, and in a minute, down he comes again, looking insulted. Says the mate, 'What did you come down for?' 'Praps I didn't notice that there ain't any ladders above there.' You see, we hadn't any shrouds above the foretop. The men bursted out in a laugh, such as I guess you never heard the like of. Next night, which was dark and rainy, the mate ordered this chap to go aloft about something, and I'm dummed if he didn't start up with an umbrella and lantern! But no matter; he made a mighty good sailor before the voyage was done, and we had to hunt up something else to laugh at. Years afterward, when he comes into Boston, mate of a

town with the second mate, and it so happened that we stepped into the Revere House, thinking may be we would chance the salt-horse in that big dining-room for a flyer, as the boys say. Some fellows were talking just at our elbow, and one says, 'Yonder's the new governor of Massachusetts, at the table over there, with the ladies.' We took a good look, my mate and I, for we hadn't either of us ever seen a governor before. I looked and looked at that face, and then all of a sudden it popped on me. But I didn't give any sign. Says I, 'Mate, I've a notion to go over, and shake hands with him.' Says he, 'I think I see you doing it, Tom.' Says I, 'Mate, I'm a-going to do it.' Says he, 'Oh, yes, I guess so. May be you don't want to bet you will, Tom?' Says I, 'I don't mind going a V on it, mate.' Says he, 'Put it up.' 'Up she goes,' says I, planking the cash. This surprised him. But he covered it, and says, pretty sarcastic, 'Hadn't you better take your grub with the governor and the ladies, Tom?' Says I, 'Upon second thoughts, I will.' Says he, 'Well, Tom, you are a dum fool.' Says I, 'May be I am, may be I ain't; but the main question is, do you want to risk two and a half that I won't do it?' 'Make it a V,' says he. 'Done,' says I. I started, him a giggling and slapping his hand on his thigh, he felt so good. I went over there, and leaned my knuckles on the table a minute, and looked the governor in the face, and says I, 'Mr. Gardner, don't you know me?' He stared, and I stared, and he stared. Then all of a sudden he sings out, 'Tom Bowling, by the holy poker! Ladies, its old Tom Bowling, that you've heard me talk about,—ship mate of mine in the *Mary Ann*.' He rose up, and shook hands with me ever so hearty—I sort of glanced around, and took a realizing sense of my mate's saucer eyes—and then says the governor, 'Plant yourself, Tom, plant yourself; you can't cat your anchor again till you've had a feed with me and the ladies!' I planted myself alongside the governor, and canted my eye around toward my mate. Well, sir, his dead-lights were bugged out like tompons, and his mouth stood that wide open that you could have laid a ham in it without him noticing it."

There was great applause at the conclusion of the old captain's story; then, after a moment's silence, a grave, pale young man said:

"Had you ever met the governor before?"

The old captain looked steadily at this inquirer awhile, and then got up and walked aft without making any reply. One passenger after another stole a furtive glance at the inquirer, but failed to make him out, and so gave him up. It took some little work to get the talk-machinery to running smoothly again after this derangement; but at length a conversation sprang up about that important and jealously-guarded instrument—a ship's time-keeper, its exceeding delicate accuracy, and the wreck and destruction that have sometimes resulted from its varying a few seemingly trifling moments from the true time; then, in due course, my comrade, the reverend, got off on a yarn, with a fair wind and everything drawing. It was a true story, too,—about Captain Rounceville's shipwreck—true in every detail. It was to this effect:

Captain Rounceville's vessel was lost in mid-Atlantic, and likewise his wife and his two little children. Captain Rounceville and seven seamen escaped with life, but with little else. A small, rudely-constructed raft was to be their home for eight days. They had neither provisions nor water. They had scarcely any clothing; no one had a coat but the captain. This coat was changing hands all the time, for the weather was very cold. Whenever a man became exhausted with the cold, they put the coat on him and laid him down between two shipmates until the garment and their bodies had warmed life into him again. Among the sailors was a Portuguese, who knew no English. He seemed to have no thought of his own calamity, but was concerned only about the captain's bitter loss of wife and children. By day he would look his dumb compassion in the captain's face; and by night, in the darkness of the driving spray and rain, he would seek out the captain, and try to comfort him with caressing pats on the shoulder. One day, when hunger and thirst were making their sure inroads upon the men's strength and spirits, a floating barrel was seen at a distance. It seemed a great find, for doubtless it contained food of some sort. A brave fellow swam to it, and, after long and exhausting effort, got it to the raft. It was eagerly opened. It was a barrel of magnesia! On the fifth day an onion was spied. A sailor swam off and got it. Although perishing with hunger, he brought it in its integrity and put it into the captain's hand. The history of the sea teaches that, among starving, shipwrecked men, selfishness is rare, and a wonder-compelling magnanimity the rule. The onion was equally divided into eight parts, and eaten with deep thanksgivings. On the eighth day a distant ship was sighted. Attempts were made to hoist an oar, with Captain Rounceville's coat on it for a signal. There were many failures, for the men were but skeletons now, and strengthless.

At last success was achieved, but the signal brought no help. The ship faded out of sight and left despair behind her. By and by another ship appeared, and passed so near that the castaways, every eye eloquent with grati-