

DAREDEVILS OF COAST AND PORT

They Are the Tugboatmen of America and They Face More Danger Than the Deep-Sea Sailor.



ATINY tugboat was threading her way full steam ahead, puffing and snorting, into the Brooklyn Navy-Yard—dancing in and out among a flotilla of steam launches, rowboats and scows as cleverly as a lady in a crowded ball-room.

"Say, captain!" sang out an officer leaning over the rail of the cruiser Cincinnati. "Aren't you afraid to come into the Navy-Yard like that?"

"Afraid!" retorted the tugboat skipper in scornful tones. "We aren't afraid of anything in this business. Give me a dozen old tugboatmen, and I'll come in and take your blessed Navy-Yard, battle-ship and all!"

"By the Lord," said the officer to himself, softly, looking at the old shellback's fierce, weather-beaten face. "I believe he'd be capable of it at a pinch."

This anecdote is illustrative of the frame of mind of the typical tugboatman. There is no peril too great, no chance too risky for these dare-devils of coast and port—of New York, Chicago, Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, San Francisco, New Orleans and a score of other American harbors.

Daily Perils of Tugboatmen.

Poet and novelist never tire of recounting the dangers to which the deep-water sailor is exposed. But he leads a safe and placid life compared to that of the tugboatman who picks up a living by plying to and fro among the crowded shipping of a busy port. Daily, almost hourly, the tugboatman faces such perils as come to the deep-water sailor only once in a voyage or once in a year. He knows this very well, and has a lofty contempt for "them that go down to the sea in ships and do their business on great waters."

"Steamer cap'n's?" said the skipper of a tugboat the other day. "Don't talk to me about 'em! They're as timid as steel-wire grass smartweed, dogfennel and all their myriad foes. Reluctantly leaving the flowery kingdom, the champion of the oppressed, with glittering blade of steel, walked down into the valley of distress and began at once dealing death and destruction right and left. Yet even as she did it she felt a kind of pity for the innocent little trespasser."

Oh, Nell, if you could but see this dear old ranch garden! So quiet, and so secluded, hedged about by green, growing wild things, like a lonely little island. Across one side is an old falling fence, so tradition tells us, if it be there, it is lost to sight, and only serves as a support for vines and brambles.

There, the blackberry trails its flowery sprays, and the wild gourd "suns like a creature alive," holding up slender stems of green, tipped with fragrant, starchy, white blossoms. This, we never saw until we came to Oregon. The farmers call it a pest; if so, 'tis a most bewitching one. Here, too, are hazel bushes, not like ours, but small trees, and wild rose and salmon bushes. The latter I am quite sure, you have never seen. Nell, their blossoms are beautiful, like pink hollyhocks in miniature. The humming birds love them. Two burnished beauties were hovering above them, when I entered the garden—different from any we have before seen, making the queerest roaring, or growling sounds, not unlike a wild animal. You won't believe this, nor did I, until I had traced the incongruous sounds to them. It seemed absurd that such dainty, quivering bits of iridescence should roar like that, but they did, for I caught them in the act. Must have been the "collapser" kind, we hear of such here.

Alder and willows grow about my Eden, and wild plum and crab apple trees, today smoky with bloom and faintly sweet; underneath these a tangle of low bushes, wild flowers, tall weeds and vines. Through this wall of green, came a pleasant sound of bubbling waters, gushing

scaring the life out of the old man on the bridge.

"How do you manage that?" he was asked.

"The captain spat comprehensively.

"Why, we just creep up in the dark until we're right under his bows, and then let off an almighty big toot with the siren. Course, they haven't seen us, but of course, I just signal to my engineer to start our toot just about across the old man out of his wits."

"When he gets over the shock we make a bargain to bring him up the river and hitch 'longside. Course we come up pretty fast. Time's money in our business. He soon gets scared to death running in and out among dozens of ships when he's been used to hundreds of miles of open water all around him. He stands it as long as he can, but at last he hollers down to us, 'Say, hadn't you better go a bit slower?' The pilot grins, and, of course, I just signal to my engineer to shove her along a bit faster. We take her full tilt on the wharf till that old

man on the bridge is trembling like a jolly fish; and then we just stop her a hundred feet off and land her 'longside as if she was glass. You bet we teach those merchant skippers that we know our business."

Standing by the side of Captain Feet as he steered the tugboat Baltic through New York's crowded harbor, gave an insight into the daily perils of the business.

Slipping by Danger.

No sooner had the Baltic got clear of her wharf than another tugboat bore down on her starboard side and a big ferryboat threatened to ram her on the port. It seemed impossible to escape a collision with one or both of them, but Captain Feet gave a little twist to the wheel and the Baltic glided out of danger, missing the stern of the ferryboat by a few feet.

"Wasn't that a pretty near thing?" the landlubber queried.

"The captain looked surprised.

"We shouldn't call that near," he said.

"If you want adventure you've chosen the wrong time. The river's empty to-day. A child could navigate it."

Empty? It seemed to the uninitiated eye of a landsman simply chuck full of puffing tugboats, unwieldy ferry steamers and ocean tramps, all getting in one another's way and threatening to run one another down.

The tugboat passed within a few feet of a big passenger steamer which was coming down the river as if she were a torpedo-boat. The skipper noticed his visitor's concern.

The Tugboatmen's Chief Concern.

"Collisions are very rare," he said comfortably. "A man gets so used to the business that he steers by instinct rather than reason. He dodges other boats without thinking about it, just as you would avoid bumping into people on a crowded sidewalk. A yard saves a collision over and over again, but we don't get rattled. A miss is as good as a mile."

"Our only worry is when some brass-bound captain of a nickel-plated yacht comes cutting up the river. Ten to one he knows nothing about it; and he's just like a man trying to learn how to ride a bicycle in a crowded street. He falls over everything and gets in everybody's hair. Every one of them has his stories of storm and collision and fire to tell."

"I remember," said one, "ten years ago, we were beating about off Sandy Hook, 20 miles out at sea. It was a terrible night—dark and foggy with a high sea running. I had just stepped out of the galley after supper and happened to look up. There was the stem of a big liner coming right over us! Next moment she struck us amidships and cut us clean in halves. There was hardly a second for thought, but I knew in a flash that if I jumped to port of her she would wash me into her propeller. So I jumped starboard, and as her hull flashed past me, I caught a rope dangling in the water, and they drew me aboard. Curious thing was, not one of our crew was drowned except my pet dog, that I wouldn't have taken a hundred dollars for."

"Talking of dogs," remarked another

old shellback, "did you ever hear of the dog that saved a tugboat's crew? The boat was tied alongside the wharf one night, and all the crew were asleep aboard. Along about midnight she caught fire and blazed up beautifully. The dog howled and barked, but he couldn't wake the crew, so he trotted up to the cook and bit him in the leg. The cook's yell woke the rest, and they just had time to get clear ashore before the boat was a mass of flames."

"We don't usually look on collisions as lucky things," said a third tugboatman, "but I know of a young fellow down Boston way who got a wife and a fortune through one."

"He was deckhand on a Boston tug, and she was run down one night by a tramp steamer outward bound for San Francisco. The captain was drowned, but the rest of them were picked up and carried to Trinidad. When they got there the others were sent back to Boston by the American Consul, but the deckhand liked the place and stayed getting a job to boss a gang of coolies on a cocoa plantation."

"He was a smart young fellow, and he made good. In a couple of years he was the planter's chief overseer and had a small plantation of his own besides. Then the planter's daughter came out from England, where she had been finishing her education. They fell in love with each other and got married. The planter gave 'em a pretty good start, and now that deckhand is one of the wealthiest cocoa-growers in Trinidad and has a treasure of a wife. It was a lucky collision for him."

Tennyson's Tugboat Captain.

This story recalled a sadder tale, which is related of an English tugboat skipper. It was told to Tennyson by the late Lord Acton, and is supposed to have suggested "Enoch Arden."

The skipper's tug was cut down in Southampton Water by a Royal Mail steamer bound to the River Plate. He was saved, but passed before he saw South America he got mixed up in a revolution and was thrown into jail. After his release a series of misfortunes prevented him from returning home, and over two years he passed before he saw Southampton again. His home-coming was like that of Enoch Arden. He found that his wife, believing him to be dead, had married another man. His house and his possessions were in the hands of a stranger. He did not languish and die, like the hero of the poem; he simply went back to South America after a painful interview with his wife, who vainly implored him to stay, and he was never heard of again.

Tugboat Tragedies.

As a rule, tugboatmen are happy, jovial fellows, full of fun and high spirits; but tragedy is never far removed from their lives. As they pass, they may pick up a dead body floating in the harbor—some unhappy girl who has flung herself off the bridge, or some drunken deckhand who has fallen off the wharf while trying to stagger to his ship's side.

"I ought to be hardened to it by this time," said the mate of a tugboat, referring to this unpleasant part of his

ELIZABETH IN HER NEW OREGON HOME

JUBILANT SONG OVER HER GARDENING ON A PERFECT DAY IN BLOOMING MAY

AMONG THE POINTED FIRS—My Dear Nell: This is the loveliest of May mornings, the sky as blue as a robin's egg.

There's a rustle of leaves in the tall forest trees. And the brook sings a lullaby sweet.

For two hours I have been at work in the garden, weeding onion, radish and lettuce beds. Though this sounds prosaic, it was, instead, idyllic. I had started upon my errand with but little enthusiasm, being tired from churning—50 revolutions per minute, you know—but with the first glimpse of the glory of the orchard I cried: "Oh, be swift, my soul! Be jubilant, my feet!" I couldn't hurry fast enough to that tower of pink and white beauty lying on the sunlit hillside in all the dewy freshness of the early morning. As I reckoned it, it seemed to me nothing in the wide world could be sweeter. The air, so soft and pure, filled with the delicate perfumes of pear, plum and apple blossoms; shadow and shine rippling through the tall grass; swaying upon and flashing through the flowery branches, plumb robins with satiny throats of orange, the bluest of bluejays with drum-major top-knots, and a shining host of wild canaries. A big pear tree seemed alive and fluttering with three tiny birds—little shimmering knots of gold among the white blossoms. They came here in swarms last Spring, though earlier when the peach trees were blooming. I remember that Tom called me to come out and see a "yellow peach tree." He thought there were a hundred or more on one tree.

Oh, such a flurry, flutter and twitter as there was up among these pink blossoms! Such a multitude of little yellow birds we had never before seen. We were as excited as two children. They stayed but a day or two in such numbers, though many remained throughout the Summer.

I suppose this is another party of tourists stopping over with us today, thinking they have reached Paradise. And it is little wonder, for it is like it.

I, too, longed to stay there all the day

from the roots of a group of alders just above me, a pure little rill of it comes sliding down the hillside, under bending briars, tall grasses and nodding rushes.

Who wouldn't enjoy weeding in such a glorified nook, hearing the music of rustling leaves, falling waters, and a chorus of bird voices, a "noir invisible" hidden away in those green temples.

In the early morning the birds seem almost deliciously happy, singing with a "fine, careless rapture," as if from mere joy of living. In the evening their notes though very sweet, are pathetic, just hinting of unrest. Is it from weariness, or is it anxiety? It is a plaintiveness too fine, and elusive to be rightly interpreted by my dull senses.

I am ashamed that I know so little about birds, not even the names of one-half that we see here, and yet I love them beyond rubies and pearls. And it is well for me, otherwise would I go sighing through this vale of tears.

As I crouched there working, and thinking of these things, I suddenly heard a very familiar bird voice, and looking up, saw perched upon a curving willow wand, a little wood wren, that comes many times each day to the porch for crumbs. If I am not in sight, he lights on to the railing and calls persistently until I appear. He has become quite fearless, hopping so near to me that I could reach him with my hand.

"You dear little thing, how did you know me so far from home?" I asked.

He peered down at me, then with a quick flirt of his tiny brown body, said: "I know, I know," and began twittering in the softest, friendliest way imaginable. A most lovable bird is little "Hop o' My Thumb" as Tom calls him. He introduced himself to us early last Winter, and now we are intimate friends.

By this time the sun was shining down hot, and I was glad when the last of the onions were freed from their tormentors. They stood in long, straight ranks, like little soldiers, "wearing of the green," and I think saluted me, as a conquering hero. I glanced at the parsley bed, and I could see the little crinkly new-comers

looking up through dog-fennel, gasping for breath; but so was I, and had coolly to ignore the mute appeal.

While I know of no more fascinating work than weeding a garden, the stooping position makes it hard. If the beds sat up high like counters, with light rattan seats running round them, the work would be ideal. I'll have that kind some day, when my long overdue ship sails into the harbor. To rest and escape the heat, I recrossed the raging Tiber, went again up in the orchard, sat down under an apple tree, threw off my sunbonnet and with it "the cares that infect the day," and just gave myself up to the spell of that world of bloom.

The blossoms drifted at my feet.

The orchard birds sang clear:

And softly now, in the later morning, their notes blending deliciously with the low murmur of leaves, rippling waters and the faint tinkling of sheep bells far down the leafy lane.

The grass all about me, thickly studded with wild flowers, everywhere little tongues of flame were darting up through the green, from some queer plant new to me; patches of tall buttercups waving to the sunshine like cloth of gold; white honey-suckles, and purple and lavender fleur-de-lis, beams of them. Over these a canopy of pink and white; over all the bending hills of heaven, around all these mighty hills of God, spiced with the eternal green of the jagged fir trees.

Into my heart stole that peace which passeth understanding, with a tide of thanksgiving toward the all-loving Father who gives to his poor, tired children such glimpses of glory and of beauty, as they travel the long, briary road stretching out from life's dawn to life's dusk.

Then I pitied you, Nell, and all the denizens of great cities imprisoned in brick and stone, so far away from these blessed hills of Oregon, where "there's room to turn round in, to breathe, and to be free." At such times the world, your world, Nell, seems remote and unreal. No sound from it pierces our leafy barricade. No changing bells, no whistles, no shrieking engines, no brass bands nor throbbing drums invade this sweet peacefulness.

We grow contented living in this vast

solitude, half believing that we are the only inhabitants of the earth, that the machinery of the universe is kept oiled and running just for us, until the mail arrives, as it does, sometimes once a week, but oftener once in two weeks; then, as we unfurl the manifold pages of the metropolitan papers we learn that that are others; that the classes and the masses are still going up and down the world in the good old way—being drowned at sea, mangled in railway wrecks, blown into gasoline launches, automobiles, powder and dynamite explosions; roasted in mines, lacerated by machinery, shaken by earthquakes, crushed by falling mountains and walls, tossed by mad bulls, eaten by sharks, stung by scorpions and bored into by deadly woodticks. We see that you still suffer from plague, small-pox, leprosy and lumpy jaw; that such of you as have escaped this doom are not in the insane asylums or prisons or getting ready to be hanged are, some of you, starting the common people by giving highly amusing monkey and horse-back dinners; others of you, not fighting monotonously in churches, witness stones and budgeons; seem to be cheerfully fighting, shooting, stabbing and poisoning each other, soaking in oil and burning your brothers.

Really, you are a lively and active people as viewed from a distance. If this industry continues, there will not be left among you enough able-bodied survivors to carry to the poor, unenlightened heathen the story of the fine, tender, uplifting humanities of a Christian world.

I suppose when we received a daily mail, this sort of thing came in smaller doses, and we became hardened to it, but coming now as it does, the whole stock-enriching flood of it—poured upon us at once, it is depressing and awful. The gruesome stories echoing sadly through our hearts even in this far off lotus land. "Where it seemeth always afternoon."

As I sat under the shade of the apple tree, pitying you upon such a tempestuous sea, who doubtless pity me in this calm anchorage, Tom just coming into the orchard called out: "You are an enterprising-looking ranch-woman."

"I know I am; but why should we

work, "and I don't mind pulling up a man's body so much as I used to do when I was a green hand. But every time we come across a woman floating in the water I turn sick and think of my little wife at home. My old captain, who'd been at the game for 40 years, used to get hysterical sometimes when this happened. I've seen him cry like a child."

"A man needs to be pretty tough at this business," the mate continued. "I've seen some nasty sights. A few years ago I was in a tugboat about 30 miles off shore, and we had picked up a leaky, rotten old tub of a schooner which had come through some heavy weather in the West Indies. A tearing gale caught us, and the towline parted. We tried to beat up to her, but a terrible sea caught her on the beam, and down she went before our very eyes, with all hands aboard."

"There's another bad day I well remember. We had a cook aboard who was too fond of whisky. He went crazy with it one day, and tried to throw himself overboard. I just managed to lay hold of him as he was half over the side, and we hauled him up in his bunk, taking away his jackknife and razor."

"Presently, passing by the door, I heard a low groan and went in. There he was, lying on the floor in a pool of blood with a horrible gash in his throat. He had broken the looking-glass and cut his throat with a piece of it. He tried to tinker him up at the hospital, but he died sure enough the next day."

The yarns which the tugboatmen tell are not all tragedies. One of the queerest is the story of the runaway tugboat. It is absolutely true, and happened in New York harbor a few years ago.

The tugboat, one of the tiniest craft of its kind in the harbor, had steam up alongside a wharf. The engineer stepped ashore for a moment, and when he turned to look at the boat he saw that the mooring line had slipped and she was steaming merrily away into the middle of the river, with nobody aboard. She had run away just as if she were a horse, and the engineer had not even the satisfaction of yelling "Whoa!"

Half a dozen other tugboats chased her, but she had full steam up and went along as if there were a crew of demons aboard, zig-zagging from one side of the river to the other, as her rudder veered with the current. Whenever her pursuers drew alongside she would suddenly whizz off at right angles and make a bee line for the other side of the river, and the chase would have to begin anew.

The whole river was in commotion. In the course of her mad career the tugboat collided with half a dozen small craft, and endangered several lives. At last, when the patience of her pursuers was exhausted and her own steam had nearly given out, she finished up by crashing into a canal-bow and sticking hard and fast. She was repaired and is plying New York harbor today. Her engineer takes good care not to let her run away again.

These are only a few of the strange and wild tales of the tugboatmen of the big harbors. Hard as nails, injured to a thousand perils, equally used to buffeting gales far out at sea in their tiny craft and to sliding under the bows of an ocean liner with only a few feet between them and instant death, these dare-devils of coast and port are the sturdiest of the heroes who "follow the sea." They love their adventurous life, and would not change it for the best billet on an ocean-going vessel.

Since a tugboatman, always a tugboatman, said to me the other day, "It's a hard life and a dangerous life, but there's no other life on earth that I know of equal to it. Sometimes one of us goes for a voyage or two on a steamer, but he is always glad to come back to the tugboat business again." BASSETT STAINES.

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