



About the author

Two years before the mast were but an episode in the life of Richard Henry Dana, Jr.; yet the narrative in which he details the experiences of that period is, perhaps, his chief claim to a wide remembrance. His services in other than literary fields occupied the greater part of his life, but they brought him comparatively small recognition and many disappointments. His happiest associations were literary, his pleasantest acquaintanceships those which arose through his fame as the author of one book. The story of his life is one of honest and competent effort, of sincere purpose, of many thwarted hopes. The traditions of his family forced him into a profession for which he was intellectually but not temperamentally fitted: he should have been a scholar, teacher, and author; instead he became a lawyer.

Born in Cambridge, Mass., August 1, 1815, Richard Henry Dana, Jr., came of a line of Colonial ancestors whose legal understanding and patriotic zeal had won them distinction. His father, if possessed of less vigor than his predecessors, was yet a man of culture and ability. He was widely known as poet, critic, and lecturer; and endowed his son with native qualities of intelligence, good breeding, and honesty.

After somewhat varied and troublous school days, young

Dana entered Harvard University, where he took high rank in his classes and bid fair to make a reputation as a scholar. But at the beginning of his third year of college a severe attack of measles interrupted his course, and so affected his eyes as to preclude, for a time at least, all idea of study. The state of the family finances was not such as to permit of foreign travel in search of health. Accordingly, prompted by necessity and by a youthful love of adventure, he shipped as a common sailor in the brig, *Pilgrim*, bound for the California coast. His term of service lasted a trifle over two years--from August, 1834, to September, 1836. The undertaking was one calculated to kill or cure. Fortunately it had the latter effect; and, upon returning to his native place, physically vigorous but intellectually starved, he reentered Harvard and worked with such enthusiasm as to graduate in six months with honor.

Then came the question of his life work. Though intensely religious, he did not feel called to the ministry; business made no appeal; his ancestors had been lawyers; it seemed best that he should follow where they had led. Had conditions been those of to-day, he would naturally have drifted into some field of scholarly research, --political science or history. As it was, he entered law school, which, in 1840, he left to take up the practice of his profession. But Dana had not the tact, the personal magnetism, or the business sagacity to make a brilliant success before the bar. Despite the fact that he had become a master of legal theory, an authority upon interna-



tional questions, and a counsellor of unimpeachable integrity, his progress was painfully slow and toilsome. Involved with his lack of tact and magnetism there was, too, an admirable quality of sturdy obstinacy that often worked him injury. Though far from sharing the radical ideas of the Abolitionists, he was ardent in his anti-slavery ideas and did not hesitate to espouse the unpopular doctrines of the Free-Soil party of 1848, or to labor for the freedom of those Boston negroes, who, under the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, were in danger of deportation to the South.

His activity in the latter direction resulted in pecuniary loss, social ostracism and worse; for upon one occasion he was set upon and nearly killed by a pair of thugs. But Dana was not a man to be swerved from his purpose by considerations of policy or of personal safety. He met his problems as they came to him, took the course which he believed to be right and then stuck to it with indomitable tenacity. Yet, curiously enough, with none of the characteristics of the politician, he longed for political preferment. At the hands of the people this came to him in smallest measure only. Though at one time a member of the Massachusetts Legislature, he was defeated as candidate for the lower house of Congress, and in 1876 suffered the bitterest disappointment of his life, when the libellous attacks of enemies prevented the ratification of his nomination as Minister to England.

Previous to this he had served his country as United States

District Attorney during the Civil War, a time when the office demanded the highest type of ability and uprightness. That the government appreciated this was shown in 1867 by its choice of Dana as one of its counsel in the prosecution of Jefferson Davis for treason. The position of legal representative before the Halifax tribunal of 1877, which met to discuss fishery questions at issue between the United States and Canada, was given him no doubt in part because of his eminent fitness, in part as balm for the wound of the preceding year.

But whatever satisfaction he may have found in such honors as time and ripening years brought to him, his chief joy and relaxation lay in travel. When worry and overwork began to tell upon him, he would betake himself to shore or mountains. Upon several occasions he visited Europe, and in 1859 made a tour of the world. At length, in 1876, he gave up active life and took residence abroad, with the idea of finding leisure for the preparation of a treatise on international law. He was still engaged in collecting his material when, on January 6, 1882, death overtook him. He was buried in Rome in the Protestant Cemetery, whose cypresses cast their long shadows over the graves of many distinguished foreigners who have sought a last refuge of health and peace under the skies of Italy.

Such a career as his would seem far enough from being a failure. Yet, in retirement, Dana looked back upon it not with-



out regret. As a lawyer, he had felt a justifiable desire to see his labors crowned by his elevation to the bench; as an active participant in public affairs, he had felt that his services and talents rendered him deserving of a seat in Congress. Lacking these things, he might have hoped that the practice of his profession would yield him a fortune. Here again he was disappointed. In seeking the fulfillment of his ambitions, he was always on the high road to success; he never quite arrived.

It is remarkable that, having written one successful book, Dana did not seek further reward as a man of letters. *Two Years before the Mast* appeared in 1840, while its author was still a law student. Though at the time it created no great stir in the United States, it was most favorably received in England, where it paved the way for many pleasant and valuable acquaintanceships. The following year, Dana produced a small volume on seamanship, entitled *The Seaman's Friend*. This, and a short account of a trip to Cuba in 1859, constitute the sole additions to his early venture. He was a copious letter-writer and kept full journals of his various travels; but he never elaborated them for publication. Yet, long before his death, he had seen the narrative of his sailor days recognized as an American classic. Time has not diminished its reputation. We read it to-day not merely for its simple, unpretentious style; but for its clear picture of sea life previous to the era of steam navigation, and for its graphic description of conditions in California before visions of gold sent the long lines

of "prairie schooners" drifting across the plains to unfold the hidden destiny of the West.



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Two Years Before the Mast.

A Personal Narrative of Life at Sea

—Crowded in the rank and narrow ship,
—Housed on the wild sea with wild usages,
—Whate'er in the inland dales the land conceals
Of fair and exquisite, O! nothing, nothing,
Do we behold of that in our rude voyage.
Coleridge's Wallenstein.

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Introduction.

California and her Missions.

It is not easy to realize that, during the stirring days when the eastern coast-line of North America was experiencing the ferment of revolution, the Pacific seaboard was almost totally unexplored, its population largely a savage one. But Spain, long established in Mexico, was slowly pushing northward along the California coast. Her emissaries were the Franciscan friars; her method the founding of Indian missions round which, in due course, should arise towns intended to afford harbor for Spanish ships and to serve as outposts against the steady encroachments of Russia, who, from Alaska, was reaching out toward San Francisco Bay.

Thus began the white settlement of California. San Diego Mission was founded in 1769; San Carlos, at Monterey, in

1770; San Francisco, in 1776; Santa Barbara, in 1786. For the general guardianship of these missions a garrison, or presidio, was in each case provided. It was responsible not only for the protection of the town thus created, but for all the missions in the district. The presidio of San Diego, for example, was in charge of the missions of San Diego, San Gabriel, San Juan Capistrano, and San Luis Rey. So, likewise, there were garrisons with extensive jurisdiction at Santa Barbara, Monterey, and San Francisco.

The Indians in the immediate vicinity of a mission were attached thereto by a sort of gentle enslavement. They were provided special quarters, were carefully looked after by the priests, their religious education fostered, and their innate laziness conquered by specific requirements of labor in agriculture, cattle raising, and simple handicrafts. It was an arrangement which worked well for both parties concerned. The slavery of the Indians was not unlike the obligation of children to their parents; they were comfortable, well behaved, and for the most part contented with the rule of the friars, who, on their side, began to accumulate considerable wealth from the well-directed efforts of their charges.

The supposition was that in the course of years the Indians might become so habituated to thrift and industry as to be released from supervision and safely left to their own devices. But that happy consummation had not occurred when, in 1826, Mexico succeeded in separating herself from the



mother country and began her career as an independent republic, of which California was a part. Nevertheless, the greed of politicians suddenly wrought the change which was to have come as the slow development of years. By governmental decree, the Indians were declared free of obligation to the friars; the latter were stripped of their temporal powers, their funds seized under the guise of a loan, and their establishments often subjected to what was little short of pillage. This state of affairs had scarcely begun at the time of the author's visit to California; still, as he points out in Chapter XXI, the decline of the missions had already set in.

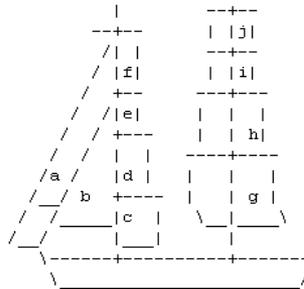
The final blow to their power and usefulness came, however, with the upheaval accompanying the Mexican war and the acquisition of California by the United States. Although this country returned all mission buildings to the control of the Church, their reason for being had vanished; they were sold, or destroyed, or feebly maintained on funds insufficient to forestall dilapidation. Fortunately the Franciscan friars had built for beauty as well as for use; the architecture which they devised in skillful adaptation of their native Spanish type displayed originality and picturesque charm. Hence, of late years, Californians have come to feel a worthy pride in the monuments of the early history of their state, and have taken steps to preserve such of them as survive. No less than twenty-one are today the goal of the traveller.

The reader who is interested in pursuing the subject thus

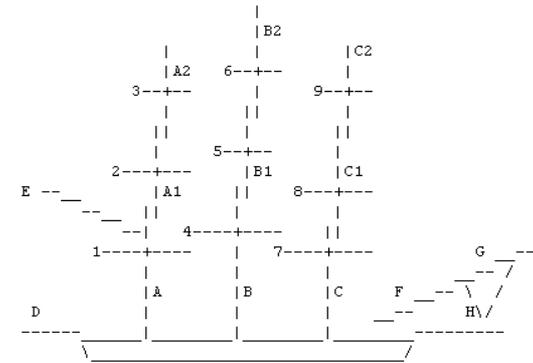
outlined will find its satisfactory treatment in George Wharton James's *In and out of the old Missions of California*, a book that combines agreeable reading with excellent illustrations.

Ship's diagrams.

The following diagrams, from which many details have been omitted, presents sufficient data for an understanding of the more important nautical terms which occur in the text.



- a. Flying jib.
- b. Jib.
- c. Foresail.
- d. Foretopsail.
- e. Foretopgallantsail.
- f. Foreroyal.
- g. Mainsail.
- h. Maintopsail.
- i. Maintopgallantsail.
- j. Mainroyal.



- A. Mizzenmast.
- A1. Mizzenmast.
- A2. Mizzenmast.
- B. Mainmast.
- B1. Mainmast.
- B2. Mainmast.
- C. Foremast.
- C1. Foremast.
- C2. Foremast.
- D. Spanker boom.
- E. Spanker gaff.
- F. Bowsprit.
- G. Jib boom and flying jib boom.
- H. Martingale boom.

Each mast also sports net-like rigging from the lowest trestletree to the deck. These are called “shrouds”.

Preface.

I am unwilling to present this narrative to the public without a few words in explanation of my reasons for publishing it. Since Mr. Cooper's *Pilot and Red Rover*, there have been so many stories of sea-life written, that I should really think it unjustifiable in me to add one to the number without being able to give reasons in some measure warranting me in so doing.

With the single exception, as I am quite confident, of Mr. Ames's entertaining, but hasty and desultory work, called "*Mariner's Sketches*," all the books professing to give life at sea have been written by persons who have gained their experience as naval officers, or passengers, and of these, there are very few which are intended to be taken as narratives of facts.

Now, in the first place, the whole course of life, and daily



duties, the discipline, habits and customs of a man-of-war are very different from those of the merchant service; and in the next place, however entertaining and well written these books may be, and however accurately they may give sea-life as it appears to their authors, it must still be plain to every one that a naval officer, who goes to sea as a gentleman, "with his gloves on," (as the phrase is,) and who associated only with his fellow-officers, and hardly speaks to a sailor except through a boatswain's mate, must take a very different view of the whole matter from that which would be taken by a common sailor.

Besides the interest which every one must feel in exhibitions of life in those forms in which he himself has never experienced it; there has been, of late years, a great deal of attention directed toward common seamen, and a strong sympathy awakened in their behalf. Yet I believe that, with the single exception which I have mentioned, there has not been a book written, professing to give their life and experiences, by one who has been of them, and can know what their life really is. A voice from the forecandle has hardly yet been heard.

In the following pages I design to give an accurate and authentic narrative of a little more than two years spent as a common sailor, before the mast, in the American merchant service. It is written out from a journal which I kept at the time, and from notes which I made of most of the events as they happened; and in it I have adhered closely to fact in every particular, and endeavored to give each thing its true

character. In so doing, I have been obliged occasionally to use strong and coarse expressions, and in some instances to give scenes which may be painful to nice feelings; but I have very carefully avoided doing so, whenever I have not felt them essential to giving the true character of a scene. My design is, and it is this which has induced me to publish the book, to present the life of a common sailor at sea as it really is,—the light and the dark together.

There may be in some parts a good deal that is unintelligible to the general reader; but I have found from my own experience, and from what I have heard from others, that plain matters of fact in relation to customs and habits of life new to us, and descriptions of life under new aspects, act upon the inexperienced through the imagination, so that we are hardly aware of our want of technical knowledge. Thousands read the escape of the American frigate through the British channel, and the chase and wreck of the Bristol trader in the Red Rover, and follow the minute nautical manoeuvres with breathless interest, who do not know the name of a rope in the ship; and perhaps with none the less admiration and enthusiasm for their want of acquaintance with the professional detail.

In preparing this narrative I have carefully avoided incorporating into it any impressions but those made upon me by the events as they occurred, leaving to my concluding chapter, to which I shall respectfully call the reader's attention, those views which have been suggested to me by subsequent reflec-



tion.

These reasons, and the advice of a few friends, have led me to give this narrative to the press. If it shall interest the general reader, and call more attention to the welfare of seamen, or give any information as to their real condition, which may serve to raise them in the rank of beings, and to promote in any measure their religious and moral improvement, and diminish the hardships of their daily life, the end of its publication will be answered.

R.H.D., Jr.

Boston, July, 1840.

Chapter 1.

Departure.

The fourteenth of August was the day fixed upon for the sailing of the brig *Pilgrim* on her voyage from Boston round Cape Horn to the western coast of North America. As she was to get under weigh early in the afternoon, I made my appearance on board at twelve o'clock, in full sea-rig, and with my chest, containing an outfit for a two or three year voyage, which I had undertaken from a determination to cure, if possible, by an entire change of life, and by a long absence from books and study, a weakness of the eyes, which had obliged me to give up my pursuits, and which no medical aid seemed likely to cure.

The change from the tight dress coat, silk cap, and kid gloves of an undergraduate at Cambridge, to the loose duck



trowsers, checked shirt and tarpaulin hat of a sailor, though somewhat of a transformation, was soon made, and I supposed that I should pass very well for a jack tar. But it is impossible to deceive the practised eye in these matters; and while I supposed myself to be looking as salt as Neptune himself, I was, no doubt, known for a landsman by every one on board as soon as I hove in sight. A sailor has a peculiar cut to his clothes, and a way of wearing them which a green hand can never get. The trowsers, tight round the hips, and thence hanging long and loose round the feet, a superabundance of checked shirt, a low-crowned, well varnished black hat, worn on the back of the head, with half a fathom of black ribbon hanging over the left eye, and a peculiar tie to the black silk neckerchief, with sundry other minutiae, are signs, the want of which betray the beginner at once. Beside the points in my dress which were out of the way, doubtless my complexion and hands were enough to distinguish me from the regular salt, who, with a sun-burnt cheek, wide step, and rolling gait, swings his bronzed and toughened hands athwart-ships, half open, as though just ready to grasp a rope.

“With all my imperfections on my head,” I joined the crew, and we hauled out into the stream, and came to anchor for the night. The next day we were employed in preparations for sea, reeving studding-sail gear, crossing royal yards, putting on chafing gear, and taking on board our powder. On the following night, I stood my first watch. I remained awake