

THAT DEAD MEN RISE UP NEVER

The month in which my seventeenth birthday arrived I signed on before the mast on the Sophie Sutherland, a three-topmast schooner bound on a seven-months' seal-hunting cruise to the coast of Japan. We sailed from San Francisco, and immediately I found confronting me a problem of no inconsiderable proportions. There were twelve men of us in the forecabin, ten of whom were hardened, tarry-thumb'd sailors. Not alone was I a youth and on my first voyage, but I had for shipmates men who had come through the hard school of the merchant service of Europe. As boys, they had had to perform their ship's duty, and, in addition, by immemorial sea custom, they had had to be the slaves of the ordinary and able-bodied seamen. When they became ordinary seamen they were still the slaves of the able-bodied. Thus, in the forecabin, with the watch below, an able seaman, lying in his bunk, will order an ordinary seaman to fetch him his shoes or bring him a drink of water. Now the ordinary seaman may be lying in his bunk. He is just as tired as the able seaman. Yet he must get out of his bunk and fetch and carry. If he refuses, he will be beaten. If, perchance, he is so strong that he can whip the able seaman, then all the able seamen, or as many as may be necessary, pitch upon the luckless devil and administer the beating.

My problem now becomes apparent. These hard-bit Scandinavian sailors had come through a hard school. As boys they had served their mates, and as able seamen they looked to be served by other boys. I was a boy--withal

with a man's body. I had never been to sea before--withal I was a good sailor and knew my business. It was either a case of holding my own with them or of going under. I had signed on as an equal, and an equal I must maintain myself, or else endure seven months of hell at their hands. And it was this very equality they resented. By what right was I an equal? I had not earned that high privilege. I had not endured the miseries they had endured as maltreated boys or bullied ordinaries. Worse than that, I was a land-lubber making his first voyage. And yet, by the injustice of fate, on the ship's articles I was their equal.

My method was deliberate, and simple, and drastic. In the first place, I resolved to do my work, no matter how hard or dangerous it might be, so well that no man would be called upon to do it for me. Further, I put ginger in my muscles. I never malingered when pulling on a rope, for I knew the eagle eyes of my forecastle mates were squinting for just such evidences of my inferiority. I made it a point to be among the first of the watch going on deck, among the last going below, never leaving a sheet or tackle for some one else to coil over a pin. I was always eager for the run aloft for the shifting of topsail sheets and tacks, or for the setting or taking in of topsails; and in these matters I did more than my share.

Furthermore, I was on a hair-trigger of resentment myself. I knew better than to accept any abuse or the slightest patronizing. At the first hint of such, I went off--I exploded. I might be beaten in the subsequent fight, but I left the impression that I was a wild-cat and that I would

just as willingly fight again. My intention was to demonstrate that I would tolerate no imposition. I proved that the man who imposed on me must have a fight on his hands. And doing my work well, the innate justice of the men, assisted by their wholesome dislike for a clawing and rending wild-cat ruction, soon led them to give over their hectoring. After a bit of strife, my attitude was accepted, and it was my pride that I was taken in as an equal in spirit as well as in fact. From then on, everything was beautiful, and the voyage promised to be a happy one.

But there was one other man in the fore-castle. Counting the Scandinavians as ten, and myself as the eleventh, this man was the twelfth and last. We never knew his name, contenting ourselves with calling him the "Bricklayer." He was from Missouri--at least he so informed us in the one meagre confidence he was guilty of in the early days of the voyage. Also, at that time, we learned several other things. He was a bricklayer by trade. He had never even seen salt water until the week before he joined us, at which time he had arrived in San Francisco and looked upon San Francisco Bay. Why he, of all men, at forty years of age, should have felt the prod to go to sea, was beyond all of us; for it was our unanimous conviction that no man less fitted for the sea had ever embarked on it. But to sea he had come. After a week's stay in a sailors' boarding-house, he had been shoved aboard of us as an able seaman.

All hands had to do his work for him. Not only did he know nothing, but he proved himself unable to learn anything. Try as they would, they

could never teach him to steer. To him the compass must have been a profound and awful whirlingig. He never mastered its cardinal points, much less the checking and steadying of the ship on her course. He never did come to know whether ropes should be coiled from left to right or from right to left. It was mentally impossible for him to learn the easy muscular trick of throwing his weight on a rope in pulling and hauling. The simplest knots and turns were beyond his comprehension, while he was mortally afraid of going aloft. Bullied by captain and mate, he was one day forced aloft. He managed to get underneath the crosstrees, and there he froze to the ratlines. Two sailors had to go after him to help him down.

All of which was bad enough had there been no worse. But he was vicious, malignant, dirty, and without common decency. He was a tall, powerful man, and he fought with everybody. And there was no fairness in his fighting. His first fight on board, the first day out, was with me, when he, desiring to cut a plug of chewing tobacco, took my personal table-knife for the purpose, and whereupon, I, on a hair-trigger, promptly exploded. After that he fought with nearly every member of the crew. When his clothing became too filthy to be bearable by the rest of us, we put it to soak and stood over him while he washed it. In short, the Bricklayer was one of those horrible and monstrous things that one must see in order to be convinced that they exist.

I will only say that he was a beast, and that we treated him like a beast. It is only by looking back through the years that I realise how

heartless we were to him. He was without sin. He could not, by the very nature of things, have been anything else than he was. He had not made himself, and for his making he was not responsible. Yet we treated him as a free agent and held him personally responsible for all that he was and that he should not have been. As a result, our treatment of him was as terrible as he was himself terrible. Finally we gave him the silent treatment, and for weeks before he died we neither spoke to him nor did he speak to us. And for weeks he moved among us, or lay in his bunk in our crowded house, grinning at us his hatred and malignancy. He was a dying man, and he knew it, and we knew it. And furthermore, he knew that we wanted him to die. He cumbered our life with his presence, and ours was a rough life that made rough men of us. And so he died, in a small space crowded by twelve men and as much alone as if he had died on some desolate mountain peak. No kindly word, no last word, was passed between. He died as he had lived, a beast, and he died hating us and hated by us.

And now I come to the most startling moment of my life. No sooner was he dead than he was flung overboard. He died in a night of wind, drawing his last breath as the men tumbled into their oilskins to the cry of "All hands!" And he was flung overboard, several hours later, on a day of wind. Not even a canvas wrapping graced his mortal remains; nor was he deemed worthy of bars of iron at his feet. We sewed him up in the blankets in which he died and laid him on a hatch-cover for'ard of the main-hatch on the port side. A gunnysack, half full of galley coal, was fastened to his feet.

It was bitter cold. The weather-side of every rope, spar, and stay was coated with ice, while all the rigging was a harp, singing and shouting under the fierce hand of the wind. The schooner, hove to, lurched and floundered through the sea, rolling her scuppers under and perpetually flooding the deck with icy salt water. We of the forecastle stood in sea-boots and oilskins. Our hands were mittened, but our heads were bared in the presence of the death we did not respect. Our ears stung and numbed and whitened, and we yearned for the body to be gone. But the interminable reading of the burial service went on. The captain had mistaken his place, and while he read on without purpose we froze our ears and resented this final hardship thrust upon us by the helpless cadaver. As from the beginning, so to the end, everything had gone wrong with the Bricklayer. Finally, the captain's son, irritated beyond measure, jerked the book from the palsied fingers of the old man and found the place. Again the quavering voice of the captain arose. Then came the cue: "And the body shall be cast into the sea." We elevated one end of the hatch-cover, and the Bricklayer plunged outboard and was gone.

Back into the forecastle we cleaned house, washing out the dead man's bunk and removing every vestige of him. By sea law and sea custom, we should have gathered his effects together and turned them over to the captain, who, later, would have held an auction in which we should have bid for the various articles. But no man wanted them, so we tossed them up on deck and overboard in the wake of the departed body--the last ill-treatment we could devise to wreak upon the one we had hated so. Oh, it

was raw, believe me; but the life we lived was raw, and we were as raw as the life.

The Bricklayer's bunk was better than mine. Less sea water leaked down through the deck into it, and the light was better for lying in bed and reading. Partly for this reason I proceeded to move into his bunk. My other reason was pride. I saw the sailors were superstitious, and by this act I determined to show that I was braver than they. I would cap my proved equality by a deed that would compel their recognition of my superiority. Oh, the arrogance of youth! But let that pass. The sailors were appalled by my intention. One and all, they warned me that in the history of the sea no man had taken a dead man's bunk and lived to the end of the voyage. They instanced case after case in their personal experience. I was obdurate. Then they begged and pleaded with me, and my pride was tickled in that they showed they really liked me and were concerned about me. This but served to confirm me in my madness. I moved in, and, lying in the dead man's bunk, all afternoon and evening listened to dire prophecies of my future. Also were told stories of awful deaths and gruesome ghosts that secretly shivered the hearts of all of us. Saturated with this, yet scoffing at it, I rolled over at the end of the second dog-watch and went to sleep.

At ten minutes to twelve I was called, and at twelve I was dressed and on deck, relieving the man who had called me. On the sealing grounds, when hove to, a watch of only a single man is kept through the night, each man holding the deck for an hour. It was a dark night, though not a black

one. The gale was breaking up, and the clouds were thinning. There should have been a moon, and, though invisible, in some way a dim, suffused radiance came from it. I paced back and forth across the deck amidships. My mind was filled with the event of the day and with the horrible tales my shipmates had told, and yet I dare to say, here and now, that I was not afraid. I was a healthy animal, and furthermore, intellectually, I agreed with Swinburne that dead men rise up never. The Bricklayer was dead, and that was the end of it. He would rise up never--at least, never on the deck of the Sophie Sutherland. Even then he was in the ocean depths miles to windward of our leeward drift, and the likelihood was that he was already portioned out in the maws of many sharks. Still, my mind pondered on the tales of the ghosts of dead men I had heard, and I speculated on the spirit world. My conclusion was that if the spirits of the dead still roamed the world they carried the goodness or the malignancy of the earth-life with them. Therefore, granting the hypothesis (which I didn't grant at all), the ghost of the Bricklayer was bound to be as hateful and malignant as he in life had been. But there wasn't any Bricklayer's ghost--that I insisted upon.

A few minutes, thinking thus, I paced up and down. Then, glancing casually for'ard, along the port side, I leaped like a startled deer and in a blind madness of terror rushed aft along the poop, heading for the cabin. Gone was all my arrogance of youth and my intellectual calm. I had seen a ghost. There, in the dim light, where we had flung the dead man overboard, I had seen a faint and wavering form. Six-feet in length it was, slender, and of substance so attenuated that I had distinctly

seen through it the tracery of the fore-rigging.

As for me, I was as panic-stricken as a frightened horse. I, as I, had ceased to exist. Through me were vibrating the fibre-instincts of ten thousand generations of superstitious forebears who had been afraid of the dark and the things of the dark. I was not I. I was, in truth, those ten thousand forebears. I was the race, the whole human race, in its superstitious infancy. Not until part way down the cabin-companionway did my identity return to me. I checked my flight and clung to the steep ladder, suffocating, trembling, and dizzy. Never, before nor since, have I had such a shock. I clung to the ladder and considered. I could not doubt my senses. That I had seen something there was no discussion. But what was it? Either a ghost or a joke. There could be nothing else. If a ghost, the question was: would it appear again? If it did not, and I aroused the ship's officers, I would make myself the laughing stock of all on board. And by the same token, if it were a joke, my position would be still more ridiculous. If I were to retain my hard-won place of equality, it would never do to arouse any one until I ascertained the nature of the thing.

I am a brave man. I dare to say so; for in fear and trembling I crept up the companion-way and went back to the spot from which I had first seen the thing. It had vanished. My bravery was qualified, however. Though I could see nothing, I was afraid to go for'ard to the spot where I had seen the thing. I resumed my pacing up and down, and though I cast many an anxious glance toward the dread spot, nothing manifested itself. As

my equanimity returned to me, I concluded that the whole affair had been a trick of the imagination and that I had got what I deserved for allowing my mind to dwell on such matters.

Once more my glances for'ard were casual, and not anxious; and then, suddenly, I was a madman, rushing wildly aft. I had seen the thing again, the long, wavering attenuated substance through which could be seen the fore-rigging. This time I had reached only the break of the poop when I checked myself. Again I reasoned over the situation, and it was pride that counselled strongest. I could not afford to make myself a laughing-stock. This thing, whatever it was, I must face alone. I must work it out myself. I looked back to the spot where we had tilted the Bricklayer. It was vacant. Nothing moved. And for a third time I resumed my amidships pacing.

In the absence of the thing my fear died away and my intellectual poise returned. Of course it was not a ghost. Dead men did not rise up. It was a joke, a cruel joke. My mates of the fore-castle, by some unknown means, were frightening me. Twice already must they have seen me run aft. My cheeks burned with shame. In fancy I could hear the smothered chuckling and laughter even then going on in the fore-castle. I began to grow angry. Jokes were all very well, but this was carrying the thing too far. I was the youngest on board, only a youth, and they had no right to play tricks on me of the order that I well knew in the past had made raving maniacs of men and women. I grew angrier and angrier, and resolved to show them that I was made of sterner stuff and at the same

time to wreak my resentment upon them. If the thing appeared again, I made my mind up that I would go up to it--furthermore, that I would go up to it knife in hand. When within striking distance, I would strike. If a man, he would get the knife-thrust he deserved. If a ghost, well, it wouldn't hurt the ghost any, while I would have learned that dead men did rise up.

Now I was very angry, and I was quite sure the thing was a trick; but when the thing appeared a third time, in the same spot, long, attenuated, and wavering, fear surged up in me and drove most of my anger away. But I did not run. Nor did I take my eyes from the thing. Both times before, it had vanished while I was running away, so I had not seen the manner of its going. I drew my sheath-knife from my belt and began my advance. Step by step, nearer and nearer, the effort to control myself grew more severe. The struggle was between my will, my identity, my very self, on the one hand, and on the other, the ten thousand ancestors who were twisted into the fibres of me and whose ghostly voices were whispering of the dark and the fear of the dark that had been theirs in the time when the world was dark and full of terror.

I advanced more slowly, and still the thing wavered and flitted with strange eerie lurches. And then, right before my eyes, it vanished. I saw it vanish. Neither to the right nor left did it go, nor backward. Right there, while I gazed upon it, it faded away, ceased to be. I didn't die, but I swear, from what I experienced in those few succeeding moments, that I know full well that men can die of fright. I stood

there, knife in hand, swaying automatically to the roll of the ship, paralysed with fear. Had the Bricklayer suddenly seized my throat with corporeal fingers and proceeded to throttle me, it would have been no more than I expected. Dead men did rise up, and that would be the most likely thing the malignant Bricklayer would do.

But he didn't seize my throat. Nothing happened. And, since nature abhors a status, I could not remain there in the one place forever paralysed. I turned and started aft. I did not run. What was the use? What chance had I against the malevolent world of ghosts? Flight, with me, was the swiftness of my legs. The pursuit, with a ghost, was the swiftness of thought. And there were ghosts. I had seen one.

And so, stumbling slowly aft, I discovered the explanation of the seeming. I saw the mizzen topmast lurching across a faint radiance of cloud behind which was the moon. The idea leaped in my brain. I extended the line between the cloudy radiance and the mizzen-topmast and found that it must strike somewhere near the fore-rigging on the port side. Even as I did this, the radiance vanished. The driving clouds of the breaking gale were alternately thickening and thinning before the face of the moon, but never exposing the face of the moon. And when the clouds were at their thinnest, it was a very dim radiance that the moon was able to make. I watched and waited. The next time the clouds thinned I looked for'ard, and there was the shadow of the topmast, long and attenuated, wavering and lurching on the deck and against the rigging.

This was my first ghost. Once again have I seen a ghost. It proved to be a Newfoundland dog, and I don't know which of us was the more frightened, for I hit that Newfoundland a full right-arm swing to the jaw. Regarding the Bricklayer's ghost, I will say that I never mentioned it to a soul on board. Also, I will say that in all my life I never went through more torment and mental suffering than on that lonely night-watch on the Sophie Sutherland.

(TO THE EDITOR.--This is not a fiction. It is a true page out of my life.)