

Redburn. His First Voyage

By

Herman Melville

Contents

- I. HOW WELLINGBOROUGH REDBURN'S TASTE FOR THE SEA WAS BORN AND BRED IN HIM
- II. REDBURN'S DEPARTURE FROM HOME
- III. HE ARRIVES IN TOWN
- IV. HOW HE DISPOSED OF HIS FOWLING-PIECE
- V. HE PURCHASES HIS SEA-WARDROBE, AND ON A DISMAL RAINY DAY PICKS UP HIS BOARD AND LODGING ALONG THE WHARVES
- VI. HE IS INITIATED IN THE BUSINESS OF CLEANING OUT THE PIG-PEN, AND SLUSHING DOWN THE TOP-MAST
- VII. HE GETS TO SEA AND FEELS VERY BAD
- VIII. HE IS PUT INTO THE LARBOARD WATCH; GETS SEA-SICK; AND RELATES SOME OTHER OF HIS EXPERIENCES
- IX. THE SAILORS BECOMING A LITTLE SOCIAL, REDBURN CONVERSES WITH THEM
- X. HE IS VERY MUCH FRIGHTENED; THE SAILORS ABUSE HIM; AND HE BECOMES MISERABLE AND FORLORN
- XI. HE HELPS WASH THE DECKS, AND THEN GOES TO BREAKFAST
- XII. HE GIVES SOME ACCOUNT OF ONE OF HIS SHIPMATES CALLED JACKSON
- XIII. HE HAS A FINE DAY AT SEA, BEGINS TO LIKE IT; BUT CHANGES HIS MIND
- XIV. HE CONTEMPLATES MAKING A SOCIAL CALL ON THE CAPTAIN IN HIS CABIN
- XV. THE MELANCHOLY STATE OF HIS WARDROBE
- XVI. AT DEAD OF NIGHT HE IS SENT UP TO LOOSE THE MAIN-SKYSAIL

XVII. THE COOK AND STEWARD

XVIII. HE ENDEAVORS TO IMPROVE HIS MIND; AND TELLS OF ONE BLUNT
AND HIS

DREAM BOOK

XIX. A NARROW ESCAPE

XX. IN A FOG HE IS SET TO WORK AS A BELL-TOLLER, AND BEHOLDS A
HERD

OF OCEAN-ELEPHANTS

XXI. A WHALEMAN AND A MAN-OF-WAR'S-MAN

XXII. THE HIGHLANDER PASSES A WRECK

XXIII. AN UNACCOUNTABLE CABIN-PASSENGER, AND A MYSTERIOUS YOUNG
LADY

XXIV. HE BEGINS TO HOP ABOUT IN THE RIGGING LIKE A SAINT JAGO'S
MONKEY

XXV. QUARTER-DECK FURNITURE

XXVI. A SAILOR A JACK OF ALL TRADES

XXVII. HE GETS A PEEP AT IRELAND, AND AT LAST ARRIVES AT LIVERPOOL

XXVIII. HE GOES TO SUPPER AT THE SIGN OF THE BALTIMORE CLIPPER

XXIX. REDBURN DEFERENTIALLY DISCOURSES CONCERNING THE
PROSPECTS OF

SAILORS

XXX. REDBURN GROWS INTOLERABLY FLAT AND STUPID OVER SOME
OUTLANDISH

OLD GUIDE-BOOKS

XXXI. WITH HIS PROSY OLD GUIDE-BOOK, HE TAKES A PROSY STROLL
THROUGH

THE TOWN

XXXII. THE DOCKS

XXXIII. THE SALT-DROGHERS, AND GERMAN EMIGRANT SHIPS

XXXIV. THE IRRAWADDY

XXXV. GALLIOTS, COAST-OF-GUINEA-MAN, AND FLOATING CHAPEL

XXXVI. THE OLD CHURCH OF ST. NICHOLAS, AND THE DEAD-HOUSE

XXXVII. WHAT REDBURN SAW IN LAUNCELOTT'S-HEY

XXXVIII. THE DOCK-WALL BEGGARS

XXXIX. THE BOOBLE-ALLEYS OF THE TOWN

XL. PLACARDS, BRASS-JEWELERS, TRUCK-HORSES, AND STEAMERS

XLI. REDBURN ROVES ABOUT HITHER AND THITHER

XLII. HIS ADVENTURE WITH THE CROSS OLD GENTLEMAN

XLIII. HE TAKES A DELIGHTFUL RAMBLE INTO THE COUNTRY; AND MAKES
THE
ACQUAINTANCE OF THREE ADORABLE CHARMERS

XLIV. REDBURN INTRODUCES MASTER HARRY BOLTON TO THE FAVORABLE
CONSIDERATION OF THE READER

XLV. HARRY BOLTON KIDNAPS REDBURN, AND CARRIES HIM OFF TO
LONDON

XLVI. A MYSTERIOUS NIGHT IN LONDON

XLVII. HOMEWARD BOUND

XLVIII. A LIVING CORPSE

XLIX. CARLO

L. HARRY BOLTON AT SEA

LI. THE EMIGRANTS

LII. THE EMIGRANTS' KITCHEN

LIII. THE HORATII AND CURIATII

LIV. SOME SUPERIOR OLD NAIL-ROD AND PIG-TAIL

LVI. UNDER THE LEE OF THE LONG-BOAT, REDBURN AND HARRY HOLD
CONFIDENTIAL COMMUNION

LVII. ALMOST A FAMINE

LVIII. THOUGH THE HIGHLANDER PUTS INTO NO HARBOR AS YET; SHE HERE
AND THERE LEAVES MANY OF HER PASSENGERS BEHIND

LIX. THE LAST END OF JACKSON

LX. HOME AT LAST

LXI. REDBURN AND HABBY, ARM IN ARM, IN HARBOR

LXII. THE LAST THAT WAS EVER HEARD OF HARRY BOLTON

Being the Sailor Boy

Confessions and Reminiscences

Of the Son-Of-A-Gentleman

In the Merchant Navy

I. HOW WELLINGBOROUGH REDBURN'S TASTE FOR THE SEA WAS BORN AND BRED IN

HIM

"Wellingborough, as you are going to sea, suppose you take this shooting-jacket of mine along; it's just the thing--take it, it will save the expense of another. You see, it's quite warm; fine long skirts, stout horn buttons, and plenty of pockets."

Out of the goodness and simplicity of his heart, thus spoke my elder brother to me, upon the eve of my departure for the seaport.

"And, Wellingborough," he added, "since we are both short of money, and you want an outfit, and I have none to give, you may as well take my fowling-piece along, and sell it in New York for what you can get.--Nay, take it; it's of no use to me now; I can't find it in powder any more."

I was then but a boy. Some time previous my mother had removed from New York to a pleasant village on the Hudson River, where we lived in a small house, in a quiet way. Sad disappointments in several plans which I had sketched for my future life; the necessity of doing something for myself, united to a naturally roving disposition, had now conspired within me, to send me to sea as a sailor.

For months previous I had been poring over old New York papers,

delightedly perusing the long columns of ship advertisements, all of which possessed a strange, romantic charm to me. Over and over again I devoured such announcements as the following:

"FOR BREMEN.

"The coppered and copper-fastened brig Leda, having nearly completed her cargo, will sail for the above port on Tuesday the twentieth of May. For freight or passage apply on board at Coenties Slip."

To my young inland imagination every word in an advertisement like this, suggested volumes of thought.

A brig! The very word summoned up the idea of a black, sea-worn craft, with high, cozy bulwarks, and rakish masts and yards.

Coppered and copper-fastened! That fairly smelt of the salt water! How different such vessels must be from the wooden, one-masted, green-and-white-painted sloops, that glided up and down the river before our house on the bank.

Nearly completed her cargo! How momentous the announcement; suggesting ideas, too, of musty bales, and cases of silks and satins, and filling me with contempt for the vile deck-loads of hay and lumber, with which my river experience was familiar.

"Will sail on Tuesday the 20th of May"--and the newspaper bore date the fifth of the month! Fifteen whole days beforehand; think of that; what an important voyage it must be, that the time of sailing was fixed upon so long beforehand; the river sloops were not used to make such prospective announcements.

"For freight or passage apply on board!"

Think of going on board a coppered and copper-fastened brig, and taking passage for Bremen! And who could be going to Bremen? No one but foreigners, doubtless; men of dark complexions and jet-black whiskers, who talked French.

"Coenties Slip."

Plenty more brigs and any quantity of ships must be lying there.

Coenties Slip must be somewhere near ranges of grim-looking warehouses, with rusty iron doors and shutters, and tiled roofs; and old anchors and chain-cable piled on the walk. Old-fashioned coffeehouses, also, much abound in that neighborhood, with sunburnt sea-captains going in and out, smoking cigars, and talking about Havanna, London, and Calcutta.

All these my imaginations were wonderfully assisted by certain shadowy reminiscences of wharves, and warehouses, and shipping, with which a residence in a seaport during early childhood had supplied me.

Particularly, I remembered standing with my father on the wharf when a large ship was getting under way, and rounding the head of the pier. I remembered the yo heave ho! of the sailors, as they just showed their woolen caps above the high bulwarks. I remembered how I thought of their crossing the great ocean; and that that very ship, and those very sailors, so near to me then, would after a time be actually in Europe.

Added to these reminiscences my father, now dead, had several times crossed the Atlantic on business affairs, for he had been an importer in Broad-street. And of winter evenings in New York, by the well-remembered sea-coal fire in old Greenwich-street, he used to tell my brother and me of the monstrous waves at sea, mountain high; of the masts bending like twigs; and all about Havre, and Liverpool, and about going up into the ball of St. Paul's in London. Indeed, during my early life, most of my thoughts of the sea were connected with the land; but with fine old lands, full of mossy cathedrals and churches, and long, narrow, crooked streets without sidewalks, and lined with strange houses. And especially I tried hard to think how such places must look of rainy days and Saturday afternoons; and whether indeed they did have rainy days and Saturdays there, just as we did here; and whether the boys went to school there, and studied geography, and wore their shirt collars turned over, and tied with a black ribbon; and whether their papas allowed them to wear boots, instead of shoes, which I so much disliked, for boots looked so manly.

As I grew older my thoughts took a larger flight, and I frequently fell

into long reveries about distant voyages and travels, and thought how fine it would be, to be able to talk about remote and barbarous countries; with what reverence and wonder people would regard me, if I had just returned from the coast of Africa or New Zealand; how dark and romantic my sunburnt cheeks would look; how I would bring home with me foreign clothes of a rich fabric and princely make, and wear them up and down the streets, and how grocers' boys would turn back their heads to look at me, as I went by. For I very well remembered staring at a man myself, who was pointed out to me by my aunt one Sunday in Church, as the person who had been in Stony Arabia, and passed through strange adventures there, all of which with my own eyes I had read in the book which he wrote, an arid-looking book in a pale yellow cover.

"See what big eyes he has," whispered my aunt, "they got so big, because when he was almost dead with famishing in the desert, he all at once caught sight of a date tree, with the ripe fruit hanging on it."

Upon this, I stared at him till I thought his eyes were really of an uncommon size, and stuck out from his head like those of a lobster. I am sure my own eyes must have magnified as I stared. When church was out, I wanted my aunt to take me along and follow the traveler home. But she said the constables would take us up, if we did; and so I never saw this wonderful Arabian traveler again. But he long haunted me; and several times I dreamt of him, and thought his great eyes were grown still larger and rounder; and once I had a vision of the date tree.

In course of time, my thoughts became more and more prone to dwell upon foreign things; and in a thousand ways I sought to gratify my tastes. We had several pieces of furniture in the house, which had been brought from Europe. These I examined again and again, wondering where the wood grew; whether the workmen who made them still survived, and what they could be doing with themselves now.

Then we had several oil-paintings and rare old engravings of my father's, which he himself had bought in Paris, hanging up in the dining-room.

Two of these were sea-pieces. One represented a fat-looking, smoky fishing-boat, with three whiskerandoes in red caps, and their browsers legs rolled up, hauling in a seine. There was high French-like land in one corner, and a tumble-down gray lighthouse surmounting it. The waves were toasted brown, and the whole picture looked mellow and old. I used to think a piece of it might taste good.

The other represented three old-fashioned French men-of-war with high castles, like pagodas, on the bow and stern, such as you see in Froissart; and snug little turrets on top of the mast, full of little men, with something undefinable in their hands. All three were sailing through a bright-blue sea, blue as Sicily skies; and they were leaning over on their sides at a fearful angle; and they must have been going very fast, for the white spray was about the bows like a snow-storm.

Then, we had two large green French portfolios of colored prints, more than I could lift at that age. Every Saturday my brothers and sisters used to get them out of the corner where they were kept, and spreading them on the floor, gaze at them with never-failing delight.

They were of all sorts. Some were pictures of Versailles, its masquerades, its drawing-rooms, its fountains, and courts, and gardens, with long lines of thick foliage cut into fantastic doors and windows, and towers and pinnacles. Others were rural scenes, full of fine skies, pensive cows standing up to the knees in water, and shepherd-boys and cottages in the distance, half concealed in vineyards and vines.

And others were pictures of natural history, representing rhinoceroses and elephants and spotted tigers; and above all there was a picture of a great whale, as big as a ship, stuck full of harpoons, and three boats sailing after it as fast as they could fly.

Then, too, we had a large library-case, that stood in the hall; an old brown library-case, tall as a small house; it had a sort of basement, with large doors, and a lock and key; and higher up, there were glass doors, through which might be seen long rows of old books, that had been printed in Paris, and London, and Leipsic. There was a fine library edition of the Spectator, in six large volumes with gilded backs; and many a time I gazed at the word "London" on the title-page. And there was a copy of D'Alembert in French, and I wondered what a great man I would be, if by foreign travel I should ever be able to read straight

along without stopping, out of that book, which now was a riddle to every one in the house but my father, whom I so much liked to hear talk French, as he sometimes did to a servant we had.

That servant, too, I used to gaze at with wonder; for in answer to my incredulous cross-questions, he had over and over again assured me, that he had really been born in Paris. But this I never entirely believed; for it seemed so hard to comprehend, how a man who had been born in a foreign country, could be dwelling with me in our house in America.

As years passed on, this continual dwelling upon foreign associations, bred in me a vague prophetic thought, that I was fated, one day or other, to be a great voyager; and that just as my father used to entertain strange gentlemen over their wine after dinner, I would hereafter be telling my own adventures to an eager auditory. And I have no doubt that this presentiment had something to do with bringing about my subsequent roving.

But that which perhaps more than any thing else, converted my vague dreamings and longings into a definite purpose of seeking my fortune on the sea, was an old-fashioned glass ship, about eighteen inches long, and of French manufacture, which my father, some thirty years before, had brought home from Hamburg as a present to a great-uncle of mine: Senator Wellingborough, who had died a member of Congress in the days of the old Constitution, and after whom I had the honor of being named. Upon the decease of the Senator, the ship was returned to the donor.

It was kept in a square glass case, which was regularly dusted by one of my sisters every morning, and stood on a little claw-footed Dutch tea-table in one corner of the sitting-room. This ship, after being the admiration of my father's visitors in the capital, became the wonder and delight of all the people of the village where we now resided, many of whom used to call upon my mother, for no other purpose than to see the ship. And well did it repay the long and curious examinations which they were accustomed to give it.

In the first place, every bit of it was glass, and that was a great wonder of itself; because the masts, yards, and ropes were made to resemble exactly the corresponding parts of a real vessel that could go to sea. She carried two tiers of black guns all along her two decks; and often I used to try to peep in at the portholes, to see what else was inside; but the holes were so small, and it looked so very dark indoors, that I could discover little or nothing; though, when I was very little, I made no doubt, that if I could but once pry open the hull, and break the glass all to pieces, I would infallibly light upon something wonderful, perhaps some gold guineas, of which I have always been in want, ever since I could remember. And often I used to feel a sort of insane desire to be the death of the glass ship, case, and all, in order to come at the plunder; and one day, throwing out some hint of the kind to my sisters, they ran to my mother in a great clamor; and after that, the ship was placed on the mantel-piece for a time, beyond my reach, and until I should recover my reason.

I do not know how to account for this temporary madness of mine, unless it was, that I had been reading in a story-book about Captain Kidd's ship, that lay somewhere at the bottom of the Hudson near the Highlands, full of gold as it could be; and that a company of men were trying to dive down and get the treasure out of the hold, which no one had ever thought of doing before, though there she had lain for almost a hundred years.

Not to speak of the tall masts, and yards, and rigging of this famous ship, among whose mazes of spun-glass I used to rove in imagination, till I grew dizzy at the main-truck, I will only make mention of the people on board of her. They, too, were all of glass, as beautiful little glass sailors as any body ever saw, with hats and shoes on, just like living men, and curious blue jackets with a sort of ruffle round the bottom. Four or five of these sailors were very nimble little chaps, and were mounting up the rigging with very long strides; but for all that, they never gained a single inch in the year, as I can take my oath.

Another sailor was sitting astride of the spanker-boom, with his arms over his head, but I never could find out what that was for; a second was in the fore-top, with a coil of glass rigging over his shoulder; the cook, with a glass ax, was splitting wood near the fore-hatch; the steward, in a glass apron, was hurrying toward the cabin with a plate of glass pudding; and a glass dog, with a red mouth, was barking at him;

while the captain in a glass cap was smoking a glass cigar on the quarterdeck. He was leaning against the bulwark, with one hand to his head; perhaps he was unwell, for he looked very glassy out of the eyes.

The name of this curious ship was La Reine, or The Queen, which was painted on her stern where any one might read it, among a crowd of glass dolphins and sea-horses carved there in a sort of semicircle.

And this Queen rode undisputed mistress of a green glassy sea, some of whose waves were breaking over her bow in a wild way, I can tell you, and I used to be giving her up for lost and foundered every moment, till I grew older, and perceived that she was not in the slightest danger in the world.

A good deal of dust, and fuzzy stuff like down, had in the course of many years worked through the joints of the case, in which the ship was kept, so as to cover all the sea with a light dash of white, which if any thing improved the general effect, for it looked like the foam and froth raised by the terrible gale the good Queen was battling against.

So much for La Reine. We have her yet in the house, but many of her glass spars and ropes are now sadly shattered and broken,--but I will not have her mended; and her figurehead, a gallant warrior in a cocked-hat, lies pitching headforemost down into the trough of a calamitous sea under the bows--but I will not have him put on his legs again, till I get on my own; for between him and me there is a secret sympathy; and my

sisters tell me, even yet, that he fell from his perch the very day I
left home to go to sea on this my first voyage.