

## What Cloverley Said

(Maggie Fearn, in 'The Alliance News.')

The sky was leaden-colored, of that peculiar slate-grey which is so dense and depressing to the eye. Sea and sky seemed to meet, without leaving any perceptible line where the two apparently communicated. The silence was almost intolerable, a silence which in some mysterious way could be heard and felt.

H. M. ship 'Endora' looked like a creation of fiction, a painted ship upon a painted ocean, vaguely, ambiguously, suspended between two spheres. There was a sufficiency of fog to render a good sailor anxious and apprehensive, with the certainty surrounding him that he was passing a dangerous piece of coast line, and the equal certainty that the fog and the atmospheric depression were developing and increasing.

However, Captain Monsell, of the 'Endora,' had retired to his cabin, with the air of a man who, for a while at least, had laid aside responsibility, and was honestly entitled to a brief interval of rest and relaxation. He had had a hard time during the previous eight-and-forty hours, and was feeling tired enough to make his comfortable cabin appear peculiarly inviting. The 'Endora' had taken a pilot on board, and Captain Monsell had handed over the care of the ship, pro tem. He drew off his heavy sea-boots and slipped his feet into a cosy pair of velvet slippers, looking complacently the while at the anchors wrought in silks which ornamented them. There was a wee wife at home, whose loving fingers had taken pride in skilfully working the devices, emblematic of safety and guardianship, and Captain Monsell thought of her and the home that she kept bright with love for him. If all went well with the 'Endora' it might not be long before he would again see wife and home, and his thoughts were pleasant ones as he stretched his feet towards the cordial warmth of the blazing, crackling fire. And the anchors were to him the symbols of safety.

On deck the first mate was idly gazing into the grey environment. His hands were thrust carelessly into his pockets, and he seemed to have momentarily forgotten the claims of duty. Indeed, everyone on the 'Endora' seemed determined to relax the taut tension of the last few hours, and let the nerves, and muscles, and brain enjoy a brief reaction from pressure, for at the wheel stood the pilot in his seaman's oil clothes.

But the exception, which tradition avows establishes the rule, occurred in the person of the steward. He of all on board the 'Endora' was not at ease. He had stepped on deck several times during the previous half hour, and had glanced silently at the pilot's stolid figure, and then at the first mate, then back again at the pilot. He had seemed hesitant, undecided, anxious, but each time he had disappeared silent as he had come. This last time, however, he had lost his hesitation, and went straight up to the first mate, and touched him quietly on the arm.

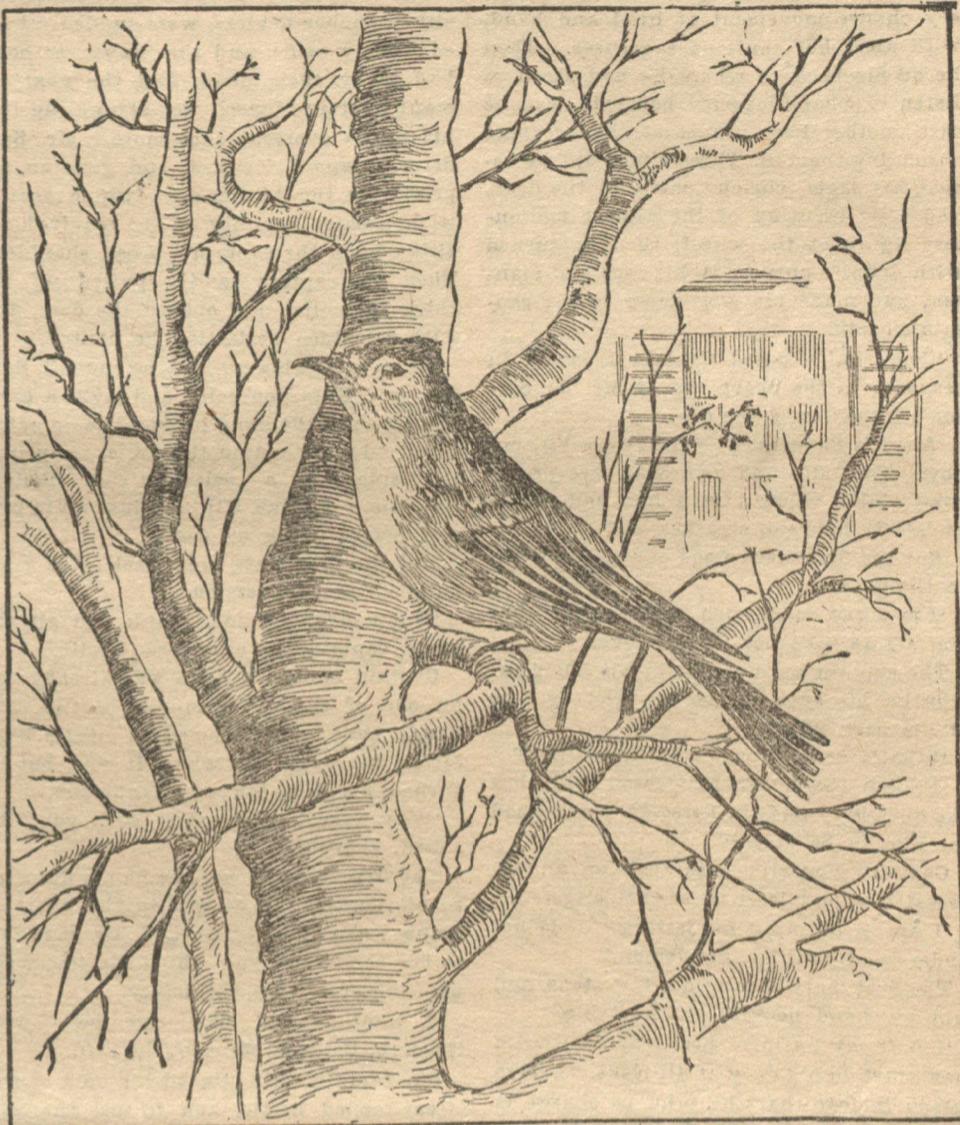
'Mr. Sanderson, sir.'

The first mate turned sharply.

'Ah, what is it, Cloverley?'

'I should like to speak to you, sir.'

'Well, I am listening.'



THE RETURN OF WINTER.

The steward turned his head, and glanced at the immovable figure of the pilot.

'This way, if you please, Mr. Sanderson. A word for your ear alone, sir, is what I mean.'

'Oh, very well. But there's no need to be so mysteriously cautious. There isn't even a seagull in sight,' said the first mate, a trifle impatient.

Nevertheless, he humored Cloverley's fancy, and followed him to the extreme end of the deck; but his manner betrayed lax interest. The steward was a grave man, and his mates declared he had of late developed some absurd 'cranks,' which threatened to spoil him, though but for these Cloverley was a good fellow enough.

'Maybe you'll think my words queer, Mr. Sanderson, and I'll be honest and say right out that I'd a great deal rather not speak them at all. But I've got to, and that's a fact, sir, and so it settles the matter.'

The steward spoke with a certain air of conviction about him that carried weight with it. The first mate began to show some signs of interest, and yet all the time he was thinking of what the sailors called 'Cloverley's cranks.' The man was in earnest, and that was something, anyway.

'Speak up,' he said, curtly. 'What's it all about, Cloverley?'

The steward hesitated one minute more, it would seem from uncertainty as to the best words to choose to convey his meaning than for any other reason; then, putting a warning finger upon Mr. Sanderson's arm, he said what he had to say, in a low but earnest tone. The first mate uttered a half suppressed exclamation of annoyance at the low words, and made an impatient movement after Cloverley commenced speaking; but gradually he became quiet, and at last, when the other had finished what he had to say, the young officer stood with bent brows and anxious eyes. Cloverley's words had evidently wrought a change in him.

'And if it is as you say, what do you suppose I am to do?' he said, irritably. The steward had his answer ready. 'Tell the captain, sir.'

'And get myself into a nice mess for doing so? It's easy enough to talk.'

Cloverley motioned with his hand to the thick pall of grey mist curtaining them on every side, and then threw a quick glance in the direction of the pilot.

'There's the ship,' he said; 'there's the ship and the cargo, and the human lives, all to think of, sir. There's times when a man has to do his duty, and not to put alongside of it what he cares to do, Mr. Sanderson.'

Then he touched his cap respectfully, and went quietly away to attend to his proper routine of work, and the first mate was left to decide what he would do.

That the duty placed before him by Cloverley was uncongenial to his feelings was plainly to be seen by the contraction of brow and lips; but the steward's last words had touched the right chord, and Mr. Sanderson's best nature responded. He walked with firm, rapid steps towards