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An American Writer at the Seafishery.

What George Allan England Wrote About Our Winter Fishery.

THE SAD FATE OF JOHNNY BURKE

It was a delight to sit in the blue-painted galley by the rusted range—shrieking nights with the ice devils whacking away at the ship's ribs—and listen to a jovial songster named Tom Pillyards. To strange-minored, droning tunes with the long-drawn notes here or there, he used to chant the melancholy episodes of many a wreck and drowning. The native songs, by the way, are mostly lugubrious, and betide those of a race constantly bereaved by the Atlantic. Here's a good example:

Come, ah! ye good people, I pray you draw near!

It's a sad lamentation, de troot' you shall hear.
Been of a you' in de 't'es of 'is bloom,
'E as lost 'is sweet life in a watery tomb.

'E was not yit married, ner orris (harvest) ner time,
Ner riches ner orris could alter 'is mind.
Till crool sad misfortune, which caused 'im to sleep
On a cold bed of sand where de water run deep.

May curse on you, Uskan, an' ah! of your breeze (breed)!
You would not help young Johnny in de time of 'is need.
You 'ave 'im to roll an' to tumble in de deep.

On a cold bed of sand where de water run deep.

As we were a-walkin' in fear (fear) Courage Bay,
To view dose fine flowers, how dey shi' faith (fate) away,
Dere birds dey 'ave deir singin' an' de flowers dey do say,
Wiles young Johnny lies drowned in fear Courage Bay.

Dere's de day of 'is funeral, 'is true de love came here,
Ahl dressed in rich robes an' her scarlet so fear,
Fer to view 'is dead body goin' down to de grave,
As a due to you, young Johnny, an' dey ahl took relief.

Dere's 'is friends an' relations lamentin' in de bay,
Likewise 'is tinder mudder, lamentin' fer 'er
De lost of 'er dear son, widout spoth er stain.
Is de flower of 'er fam-bi-ly,
Johnny Burke was 'is name!

Then there was Willy March beginnin':

De home of 'is childhood, in Northern 'E quit 'is fer pleasure, much more dan fer pay,
On de ice fields 'e ventured, most you'll an' 'ave,
Whereon 'e sought death, but 'is life could not save. . . .

Poor Willy March was drowned too,
So are almost all the heroes of these Newfoundland ballads. Uncle Luke's boat, The Bonavista Sigsare, and Come On Down, Marine! are prime favourites; likewise Betsy Brennan's Blue Hen:

Good People attention to what I will mention
Of a little Blue Hen dat I bought in de fall.
Syme villyun, 'e stole 'er to sharpen 'is molar;
A low dirty scoundrel wid plenty of gall!

Dls hen, I did pride 'er, though often de universe round I would roam fer 'er, then,
But some wicked hobbage (savage), to grease 'is white cabbage,
Run off wid me dear little beautiful hen!

And so on, and so forth. There's no end to the Blue Hen; nor is there any end to the songs—but enough!

Some day a literary archaeologist will garner all this folklore into print and preserve it before it perishes. What a treasure!

Among the sealers certain figures loom gigantic. Such a one is Cap'n Arthur Jackman, dead but never forgotten. Long before I reached Newfoundland, on the steamer from New York, I began hearing about Jackman's incredible exploits. Many people in St. John's told me about him. And at the ice sealers were constantly recalling bits from the Jackman legend. Jackman seems almost a national hero.

It was Jackman, most famous of seal killers, who once, when he had an infected thumb called for a hatchet and calmly chopped that thumb off, "standin' dere on de ship's bridge, sir, barehanded and in a green split-tail coat." It was Jackman who once knocked a man down into the hold, jumped after him, failed him around, whereupon the man sank all his teeth in Jackman's leg and went waving crazy.

The sealers tell you how Jackman was never drunk at sea or sober on land; how he used to trick all the other sealing captains and clean up the patch before they could reach it; how, one time, though short of coal himself, he dumped twenty tons on the ice for a rival captain to pick up; how another time, when his funnel was ripped off by a blizzard, he built a wooden tunnel and carried on to success.

"Boughest man in de world, sir, but inside of him was a real man; Seven foot high, he was, wid a hand like a bucket. Big-boned, sir, 'an hard as de devil's 'id. Only one man ever licked 'im—that was a Scotch engineer 'e locked into de cabin to give a beating to. De engineer hammered 'im stiff, 'an Jackman loved 'im fer it."

"Honest as de sun he was, an' true as steel! He had calendar every night, sir, an' 'e had a calendar printed without no Sunday on up, at ahl, so dere wouldn't be no Sunday's aboard."

He'd put de Sunday men on de ice, an' keep 'em dere all day.

"Very polite he could be too. One time he says to a man he was fightin' wid, 'Please don't come a-nigh me or I'll have to spit you wid dis hatchet!' Oh, Jackman was 'id of 'em ahl. He made up to seven thousand dollars a year"—fabulous wealth, for Newfoundland—"an' died clean broke. Give every cent away, he did. His funeral procession was de laargest ever seen in St. John's. Oh, dere never was nary un like Cap'n Jackman!"

PICTURES NOT YET PAINTED.

The reference to Sunday men requires explanation. Before the Sabbath law went into effect certain men refused to kill seals on Sunday, and these were Sunday men. To-day, seal killing is taboo on Sunday. One day in seven no drop of blood must be spilled. Even though the ships toil through ice and storm for six days, finding nothing, and then on Sunday run into a wondrous spot of fat, the

seals are safe. By Monday they may be all gone again; no matter. The law holds like iron.

The rest of the day is observed by merely towing in sculps—often over miles of rough ice—by talking down, shifting coal, bumping ballast, and in general doing harder work than would kill the average American. Saturday night there's a general clean-up, that means little more than a shave. A rare sight, that is, by the smoky light of lanterns in the castles, the "tween-decks and the tounge. The preacher—every ship carries one—shaves many. He strops his razor deftly on the leg of his Esquimaux skin boot, lathers all from one cracked cup, takes off terrific stubble, while the men, seated on their "blue sea" chests, hold a tiny mirror and squint at themselves with approving eye. Just the shave suffices. The rest of the person does not matter. That clean sweep of the chin, letting the ruddy skin glow through the black is startling.

Ah, we have to be able to paint some of those scenes on shipboard, as well as those of crimson slaughter! No Sorolla, no Vereschagin ever flung more color on canvas than a sealing vessel has to offer. I feel irritated that painters flock to Provincetown or Gloucester and waste pigment on foolish little dories, lobster traps and fish sheds, or that Winslow Homer should have achieved fame with the Banks coddlers and skippers, when the North is glowing, burning with scenes that utterly defy words, that simply ache to be painted.

One of these days some painter will brave the ice fields and will leap to instant fame by catching a tithe of what the sealers have to offer. But note well, he must carry buckets of red paint and must know how to slap it on thick. He must know how to limn black interiors, where lamp gleams hint at coal-faced, crimson-handed men. He must catch the play of grotesque shadows, the drift of the pipe smoke, the glint of hold eyes, the flash of teeth, the atmosphere of lurking tragedy, the mystery and vagueness, the elemental, gorgeous barbarism of it all.

He must interpret the spirit as well as the letter. The North is waiting for its all-revealing genius. Who will he be?

THE SIMPLE CHURCH SERVICE.

One of the finest scenes, I think, is worship in the ice; the church service of these simple, devoutly pious men. Something profoundly touching stir your heart as you stand on the reeking deck where coal dust and seal oil pose up from between the rough planks; and out of the dim-glowing

forward companion hear full-throated hymns—There is an Anchor Kept in the Soul, or Nearer my God to Thee, or in the night far away, vague white gloom. The ship is less in the ice, her engines muted service. She lies there, a ghost in a world of ghostliness; or, if lit by wind and rig agitter, ice under the white blaze of a moon not here. And from her the voices of man ascend in prayer, in those far places of frozen world.

It is a vision unforgettable to dwell into the "tween-decks, to crouch in a corner on a sea of ice to watch these Vikings of the North at worship. But yesterday they were gory butchers. This night bow with sincerity that thrills the Power they feel very near; through the hatch the pole star peers, and not far off the thunder all along a drifting boat. Dim-seen, hazy, colking, sea ters, sea boots, gaffs, knives, tools on smoky beams stand pots and the crude ware from which the men feed in gangs, huddled about chests. Tin lamps on stanchions yellow blotches in the darkness, ting on floors, boxes, bunks. The ears listen with profound attention the reading, painfully halting, of Word.

Now they all stand, and with vigor join in I Need Thee Every Hour, led by preacher Levi Butt, whose day's hol's as crimson-handed the rest—who times out the stanzas by stanza. None sing all carry the air. The very timber green-heart oak quiver with the tenacity of their fervor. With stirring quivers and quick upsurges the hymn bursts forth. One voice dominates the rest; but it comes from out of what coveys black corner you cannot tell, bogs, the cracked, little things red light on uncouth sea. Yes, this should be painted, truly all the world to see.

To be continued.

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Richard's Liniment used by Phyllis

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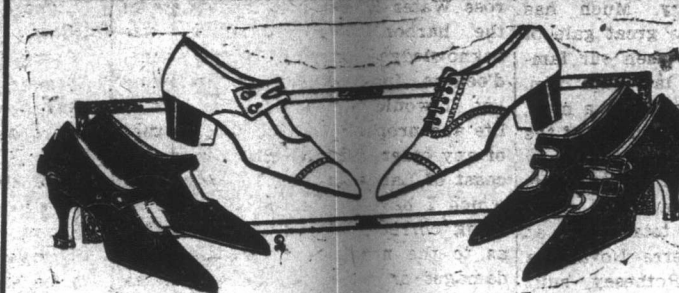
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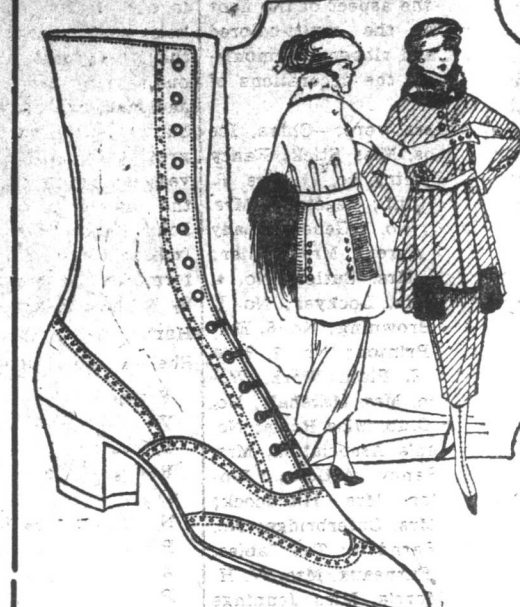


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—By Bud Fisher