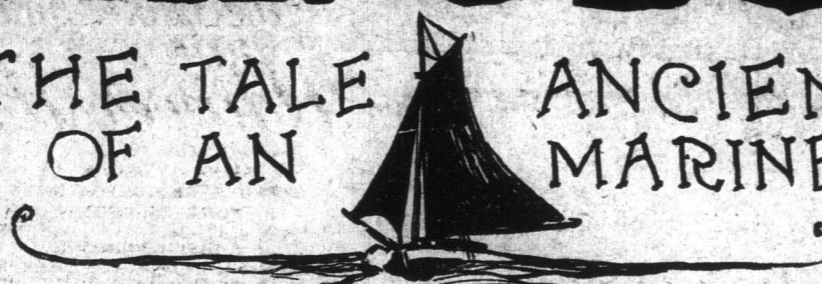


FORTY YEARS in a FISHING BOAT

THE TALE OF AN ANCIENT MARINER



It was an Ancient Mariner,
And he stoppeth one of three;
"By thy fishy scent and cold grey eye,
Now, wherefore stoppest thou me?"

He held him with his glittering eye:
"Give me a smoke," quoth he,
"Twas then was told this truthful tale,
Which I pass on to thee."

(From the Poets.)

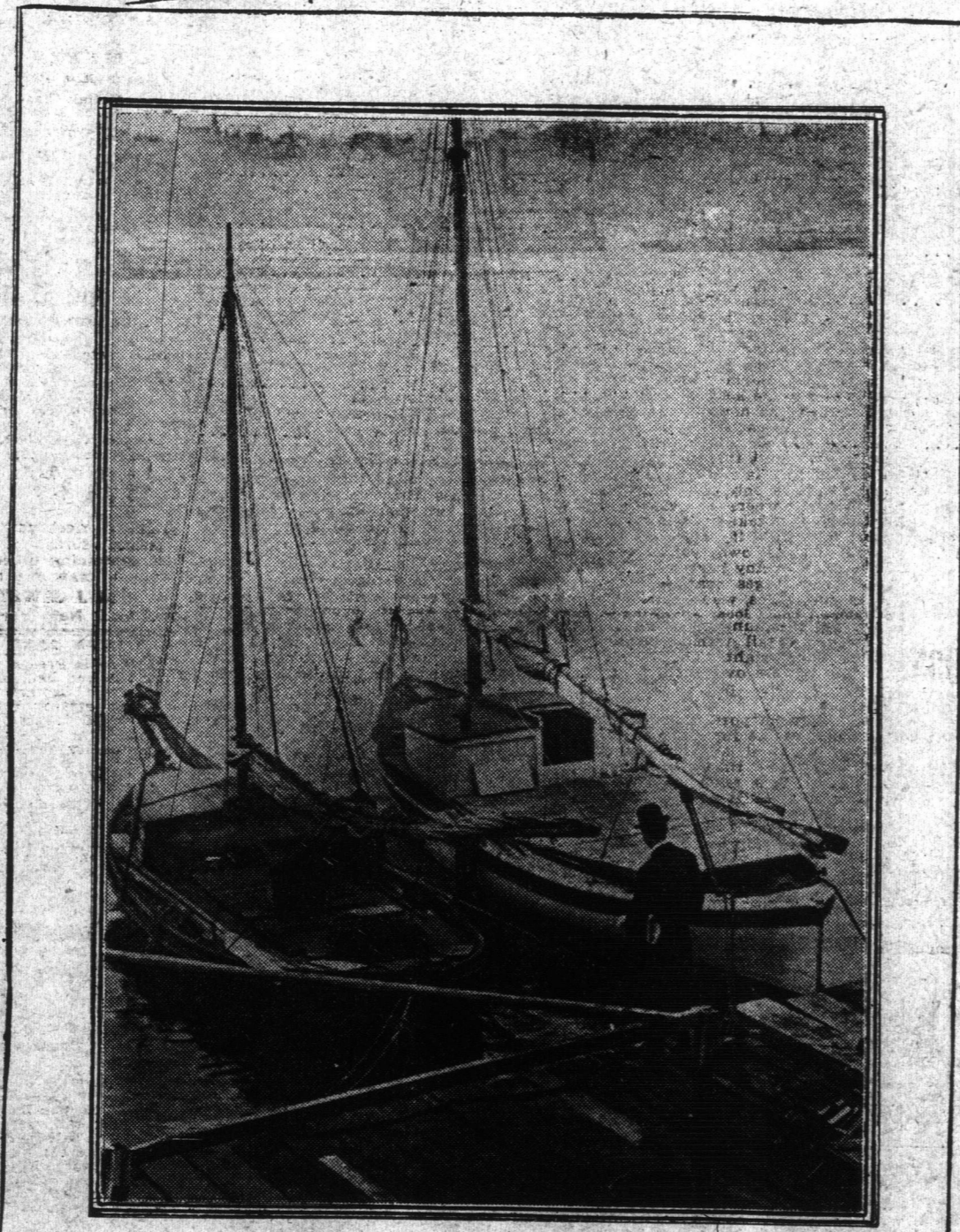
HIS name is Tony—that is all. Once, a long time ago, he had another name, and the "Tony" was the more pretentious but less convenient "Antonio." That was, as I have said, a very long time ago, for Tony has been living in a fishing boat in Victoria harbor for forty years past, and all that time he has been content with the two-syllabled title. There was a family name once, but that does not matter now, as Tony will tell you, if you ask him. Any relatives he has are as far away as Palermo, quite out of the reach of a fisherman unschooled in letters. Besides, the mission of a name is to identify one, and certainly "Tony" identifies Tony, the fisherman.

Forty years in a fishing boat! That is a record it would be hard to beat in these waters. There wasn't very much Victoria when Tony came here as a sailor on a British merchant vessel, and decided to go into business for himself in the uttermost West. The fishing fleet was smaller than it is now, and the fishing business—as Tony has practiced it—considerably more profitable. This last point, in fact, is a burning issue with Tony. If you want an utterly frank and, above all things, enlightening commentary on the Oriental immigration question, go to him. Grizzled veteran that he is, he has two pet grievances of his own—Japanese fishermen, and the decadence of the human stock in this generation. "When I was young," says Tony, "there were none of these things."

In forty years' time Victoria has made gigantic strides, as the Colonist has endeavored to show in its Jubilee edition. The city has grown to its present extensive proportions from the nucleus of a Hudson's Bay post. From a fur-trading establishment of one hundred souls, there has been evolved a proud metropolis, the Mecca of the world traveller in quest of the ideal scenery and climate, a commercial port that stands high in the eyes of the world. All these things Tony has watched from his conning-tower, the tiny hatch that leads to the tiny cabin on his tiny boat. But many of the changes have held for him only a vague interest, as is natural with a man whose world is bounded on the one side by the cod banks in Haro Straits, and on the other by the little fish wharves by Turret Rock, where the Chinamen come down to buy the fisherman's catch. He can speak with confidence of the shipping of the city, for that has all come under his notice down there on the bay. You cannot stick him on the development of the boat-building art, even if his own house-boat is a perfect example of the models of 1868 or thereabouts. Strange to say, he is not at all in favor of all this progress, for, he says, it interferes with his business. An interesting character is Tony, and some of his rude philosophy, worked out all by himself in his cabin, where he has nursed his rheumatism in proud seclusion for some years back, is worth while setting down here.

The first time I met Tony, which was in the course of a tour on the waterfront last summer, I learned that he had an abiding dread of cameras and all picture apparatus. Newspaper men of all kinds are included in the ban, and there is a reason for this. It would not be fair to divulge here the sad secrets of Tony's past, that partly explain his love of solitude. If he has the Mediterranean weakness for the stiletto, that is, after all, his own affair. So it was on the basis of an ordinary "local color" seeker that I gained admittance to Tony's fishing vessel, and on the basis of tobacco that we became almost friends.

He is an old man now, Fisherman Tony. Like many of his race, he has seemed to "grow down" with advancing years, while retaining much of the supple strength of his youth. As I climbed down the rickety steps that lead to the fish wharves, I caught sight of his grizzled head peeping out of the hatchway of the fishing boat. It was the stocking-cap—the "tuque" of the French-Canadian habitant—that first caught the eye. Then a sharp, almost distinguished face, with bristling, pointed moustache, and more or less severe and military mien, attracted the gaze, and held it.



THE HOME OF TONY THE FISHERMAN

Tony is hardly the sort of man you would expect to find under Turret Rock. He offers a study for a Michel Angelo. He grunted a surly response to the easy "good morning." Then, when I attempted to board the boat, he withdrew a little into his cabin, grumbling to himself. It was the camera, of course. "You take away," said Tony. "I no like." So the offending machine was taken away, and Tony grew more affable.

We sat out on the weather-beaten deck, and talked of several things, mostly, of course, of Japanese fishermen and the morals of the age. I had tried the cabin, crawling painfully through the tiny hatchway to the squalid interior, but one minute there was enough. Tony's domicile is compact and probably convenient, but ventilation is a stranger to it. And the fisherman has his own peculiar views on cleanliness. So we returned to the outer air, where the fish-tainted atmosphere was like rose leaves by comparison. The substance of Tony's story can be given, although his unique accent cannot be reproduced.

"Yes," said the old fisherman, as he puffed at his blackened clay pipe, "yes, I am here since more than forty years, here in this boat. It is my home, and it is good enough for an old man. No, there is not much room, but I have my bed, and my stove, and I need no more. When I was young I learned to live simply, when I was in the navy of Greece. That training was good for me.

"It would be a fine thing if all these youngsters of today had to spend four years on a warship, learning to be men, and eating black bread and olives. Yes, that is good for boys. "See me—I am eighty years of age, me, and I can still work my boat myself and bring in my catch with the best of them. When

you are eighty years old, eh? If you are not dead you will be helpless. So with all the rest of this generation. They are no good—bah! They sleep too warm, and eat too well, and drink, drink! When I was a boy I did not go to saloons, I tell you. If we did, our fathers would give us something to remember for many days. They are too easy with the fool boys of this country. They know how to train boys in Greece, hard work and discipline, but, above all things, discipline."

Moralising on this theme, the favorite grievance of an old fisherman whose boat had been bombarded from time to time by small boys, Tony had waxed unusually eloquent. Evidently somewhat ashamed of the outburst he retired into his shell at the end of it, biting at his pipe with a haughty air that became the old man well. And he communed with the pipe to the exclusion of other matters until the talk turned to fishing, and the Oriental invasion of that field. Then Tony came into the field again, primed for slaughter.

"How do they expect a white man to live in this country?" he demanded. "When I come here first, forty years ago, it was a white man's country all through. The fishermen had a fair field, and shared the profits of our work with white men. Now, see the difference! Thousands of Japanese have come, and the fishing is going into their hands. They are crowding us out. Soon there will be none but Japanese in the fishing. I do not like the laws of this country! In Greece they would do better."

And Tony, almost speechless with indignation, lapsed into Homeric expressions of ire, unfortunately wasted on Saxon ears. In fact, the incident all but ended that interview, for the fisherman, embittered as he is by years, rheumatism and untoward experiences, is

prone to vent his wrath on the object nearest to hand, and the interviewer was in great disfavor just then. However, tobacco is oil upon troubled waters, and as the minutes passed Tony's ruffled spirit grew calmer, and he began, little by little, to take an interest in the situation again.

The talk went back to the time when, a mere boy, he took service in the navy of his native country, leaving, when his service was ended, to enter the merchant marine of England. Those were great days, when the raw Greek boy sailed the round of the world, entering strange tropical ports that held greater wonders to his eyes than he had ever dreamed of back among the vineyards of Hellas, and meeting with the glorious adventures and the gruelling hardships that spell life in capital letters "when we are twenty-one." It was in the course of his sea-faring career that Tony, then a man grown and nearing middle life, sailed around the Horn in a Hudson's Bay ship bound for this port, and had his first glimpse at Victoria. The glamor of tramping the world had faded by this time, and Tony wanted to settle down and make a home. The new country offered allurements he had not seen elsewhere, so he gave up the "tramp royal" life to become a fisherman.

To other men Tony's idea of settling down might appear strange enough. There is cold comfort in a decked fishing boat that is about the size of the Swampscott dories of the New England coast. For a day's fishing the craft might be tolerated, but Tony lives aboard, winter and summer, eating, sleeping and cooking in a cabin some six feet by six. That life, mark you, has been his for forty years past.

The harbor has been rimmed with modern wharves and docks. Great liners pass in and out where the Beaver was a marvel in Tony's prime. Like the city, the waterfront has been transformed. And so Tony the fisherman, who is pathetic in his adherence to the old order, has crept away from all the monuments of development and moored his boat down by Turret Rock, where there has been little change in all the forty years. And there the old man sits all day long, when the fishing is not good, or his rheumatism is troublesome, pondering on the wave of change that has left him stranded, the derelict of the past.

His boat, once the pride of the local fishing fleet, is now, like the owner, an antique. He built it with his own hands when he came here forty years ago, a staunch little yawl, tubby and serviceable, of well seasoned lumber and good stout beams. Filled with distrust of the land, he built the boat that it might also be a home, fitting up a square cabin in the stern, like a large-sized rabbit hutch. And now, if Tony has one enthusiasm, it is that old boat, weather-beaten as it is, and black with age and with the smoke from the stove-pipe chimney. He may well be proud of it, for it has saved his life more than once in the course of his rough fisherman's life. Once, in a storm off Trial Island, a squall caught the vessel, when its stern was lifted from the water, overturning it completely. All one night Tony clung to the bottom, until the mast caught on a shoal, and held the boat fast, clear

of the rocky shore. Tony chose the lumber for that mast himself, and he had faith in it. That night's faith was justified, for the well-seasoned stick held firm as an anchor; and the storm abated in time to save the fisherman from being broken up on the rocks.

Three or four times after that first visit I called on Tony down by Turret Rock. He never warmed to any great extent, but each time he seemed not quite displeased to see me, and we sat on the deck of his boat and chatted for an hour. Finally, when the Jubilee Edition of the Colonist was issued, I happened to be down that way, and it occurred to me that the Old Man might care to hear something of the publication, and to look over the pictures that show the contrast between the Fort Victoria of 1858 and the Victoria of today. So I called down, and together we went over the pictures.

He was keenly interested in the front page design that showed Victoria fifty years ago. "I saw that," he declared. "It was not very different when I came. It was a fine place for a man."

In the picture of boats, fishing boats, and others, he was also interested. In fact, the visit was a success, I thought, almost to the end of it. It was certainly interesting to watch the point of view from which Tony regarded the growth and progress of Victoria. All others were proud and delighted with this advancement, expressing their feelings in terms more or less enthusiastic, depending on temperament. Tony, on the other hand, regretted the entire evolution, and expressed his regret frankly and pathetically.

Go down to Turret Rock and you will find in Tony that one grace worth all others in life, originality. Down by the bay, off Store street, you will find the fleet, a row of vessels moored at the fish wharves, where the Chinese fish-dealers keep the cod and crabs alive in open fish traps. On either side are boats with tents stretched above them in lieu of decks. These belong to the Chinese and Japanese fishermen. To the centre you will see a battered dory, black and weatherbeaten and ancient, with much smoke issuing from a crooked stovepipe on the cabin. That is Tony's dwelling-place, and if you are lucky, he will talk to you there.

You had better go yourself, for, I regret to say, I can tell no more stories of Tony. We are no longer friends, and it all came about through the incident during our last interview of which I did not speak above.

We had looked through the paper from cover to cover, and all was well. Suddenly, Tony turned to me with suspicion in his eyes, and asked me who I was.

"Why do you come here?" he demanded. "Why do you bring me papers? Are you one of those people who write for the papers? Tell me!"

Sorrowfully I admitted my guilt—sorrowfully, because I knew that the confession was the end.

"Go away!" said Tony, then. "I never want to see you more!"

And I went.

W. E. PLAYFAIR.