

with a promising knowledge of human nature for their age, were putting their pocket-money together.

"This is the wrong end of the week for us to have much pocket-money, captain," said the boys, "but we should like awfully to have you drink your own health at our expense; and if you'll tell us one of your shipwreck stories we'll promise to keep it a secret."

"Of course, on them conditions," said Captain Rattlin, as he dropped the coppers one by one into his capacious pocket, "and seeing as 'ow I'm a dealin' with honorable young gent's as knows that fifty years o' salt water makes a man powerful thirsty, on them conditions, I say, I'll 'late one o' my shipwrecks."

"In the year thirty," began the captain, "I were second mate of the brig Buster, of Liverpool. She were a rummy looking old hooker, built of wood, of course, as all o' 'em was in them days, with a square stern and a square bow, and for all the world like them ships they builds by the mile and cuts off at any length to suit. If anything got athward of 'er bow, she'd punch it along in front of 'er for a day or two. But her stern was as good as a taup's'l in a fair wind, and she were as good a sea-boat as ever rode salt water."

"The voyage I were in 'er we went clear around the world—that is, we would 'a done if we'd finished it; and we was out the best part o' two years. Our first port was New York, where we shipped a cargo o' notions—pianners, clocks, music-boxes and them kind o' things, for Orstralia. My 'but that were a lively passage. Every time we struck a good, stiff breeze the music would begin—pianners a-bangin', clocks a-strikin', an the boxes playin' everything from Annie Rooney up to Sunday school hymns; and when we caught a bit of a gale off the Cape, the Buster were a regular floating music 'all. Ah, but she were full o' chunes."

"From Melbourne we took horses up to Calcutta, which were a purty lively trip, too, on account of us running into a couple of cyclones lashed together in the Hindian Ocean, and seeing as 'ow the hanimals kicked us black and blue from truck to kerlson afore we got into the Hooghly. Then we ran down into Achyah in ballast and took in a load of rice for the Chuncha Islands, where there was a lot of Chinese coolies working. After the rice was out the captin' tried to get a cargo of guanner for to take back to Liverpool, but, do all he could, he wasn't able to get more than enough to half fill the Buster, so we set sail for Callao, hoping to pick up some freight there."

"Well, by good luck, or bad luck, as it turned out, there were a bloomin' lunatic in Callao s'had some sweet pertaters that he wanted took to Liverpool, and after we loaded down

to Plimsoll we started 'ome with the lower hold full of guanner and with four hundred tons of them 'ere wegetables stow'd atop."

"Heverything went uncommon well unti' we was well round the 'Orn. We got one or two blows on the way w'ich shook things up a bit and o' course the smell of the guanner were a trifle high, but we soon got used to that, and was werry 'appy, thinkin' we'd soon be back in Liverpool again."

"We'd just run into the south-east trades, howsomever, when one mornin' a big passenger clipper as were sailing to leeward on us hauls up into the wind and signals that she wants to speak us. We, naterally, ups our hellum and runs down to 'er, thinkin' she were in distress. We noticed as all the people aboard of 'er was a olding 'ankerchiefs to their noses, but somehow we didn't think anything on it until the captin' of 'er began to 'oller through 'is trumpet."

"'Ahoy,' he 'ails, 'what brig is that?'"

"'The Buster o' Liverpool swers our skipper."

"'What's yer cargo?'"

"'Guanner and sweet pertaters'"

"'Thought you was loaded with rotten eggs and dead mules'"

"'Well, s'pose we are,' shouts our captin', gettin' 'is dander up; 'it's better than being chock-a-block with live hasses. What do you want, anyhow?'"

"'I want you to take your stinking old brig to leeward o' me and my passengers. The smell of you is giving us all typhoid.'"

"'You be blowed,' yeils the skipper."

"The next minute he gives orders to brace up, and we starts to windward of the clipper again in a jiffy. And it was four days before that clipper got away from us."

"Well, after that the old man worried considerable. 'Im afraid, Mr. Rattlin,' he says to me one day, 'we must be in what you might call a purty hoderous condition. I think you 'ad better take all three 'atches off and give us a little hair. I'm not particular hanxious,' he says, 'to bust the Buster.'"

"'Wery good, sir,' says I, and I goes to the carpenter's shop for an 'ammer and begins knocking the wedges out o' the main 'atch. And, by George, young gentlemen, it were uncommon fortunate as we didn't wait no longer. After I'd given the comb'n' three taps I sees the middle of the 'atch bulging up'ards. 'Stan' by,' I yeils, and the wery next hiustant up she goes. All I hears is a great big puff, which blows me into the scupper, where I lays a looking up into a skyful o' yellor guanner dust, bits of tarpaulin and sweet pertaters. Ay, uncommon fortunate it were for us that we give 'er that vent. The old man, who had a fine 'ead for figures,

reckoned that if we 'ad waited another ten minutes us and the Buster would a bin in bits all over the South Atlantic."

"After such a hexperience we didn't dare close the 'atches at all, and as we 'ad a hextraordinary lot o' rain in the trades, the fust thing we knew them 'ere sweet pertaters was a sproutin' at the rate o' knots. Ye see, the orful shakin' up we'd 'ad aroundin' the 'Orn had mixed things in the hold purty much. The guanner were all around the wegetables, and the wegetables was into the guanner, and wot with that and the rain and the tropical 'eat the Buster's hold were a reg'lar forcin' 'ouse."

"Fust off, we didn't think much on it. All on us 'ad seen spuds sprout at sea afore, and it never hurted anything—'cept the spuds. But these 'ere sweet pertaters from South Ameriky were a different breed. They ain't like our spuds—they're creepers; they climbs just the same as these 'ere beans they call scarlet runners, and when they're planted in guanner there's no 'oldin' 'em back. Well, blow me if in three days the 'atches weren't like a bloomin' jungle, and in a week we knocked off regular ship's work and all hands turned to with their knives a-trying to keep down the sweet pertater vines. But, bless yer, it warn't no use; it were just like tryin' to keep back the tide. If we managed to get one of the 'atches on during the day it 'ud be busted off during the night, and for every vine we'd cut off two 'ud shoot up in its place. By the time we got into the doldrums we'd about give it up as a bad job. It soon got so bad that we couldn't get aloft in any way wotsumever, so we just drifted around in the rain and 'eat o' 'ere swelterin' lattitood, a flyin' signa's and a-growin' greener every day."

"One day, arter we'd been driftin' about for nigh onto a month, the men came ait through the sort o' tunnel we'd cut under the vines on the starboard side, and wants to see the Captin', if you please."

"'Well,' says the captin', stepping on deck, 'wot are you men arter?'"

"'Axin' yer pardin, Captin', says old Spike, the bos'un, 'but we've 'ad enough.'"

"'You 'ave, 'ave you?' snaps the skipper. 'For 'eavin's sake, wot more do you want? 'Aven't you got a good ship under yer, and yer full allowance, and ain't yer wages a-runnin' on all the time?'"

"'We ain't findin' no fault with the grub, Captin', nor yet with the wages, or the officers. Wot we say is that we shipped on a brig, not on a floatin' island. We can't see nothin' out of this snarl o' tater vines, and every ship will give us a wide berth, thinkin' o' course, we're a lump o' land. Wot we keeps a-harskin' oursel's is, 'ow is it going to enc, sir? The insects is it eatin' of us up, and the fowls o' the hair is a buildin' nests aloft. It won't