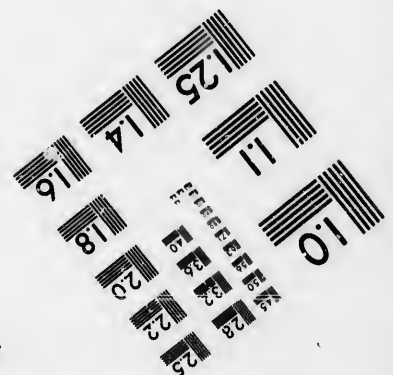
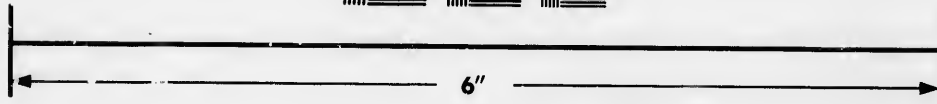
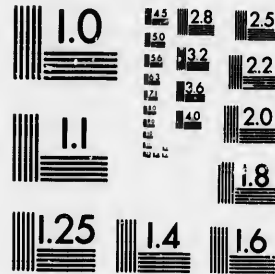


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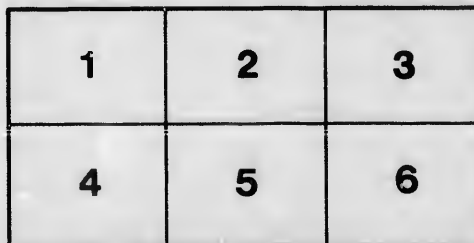
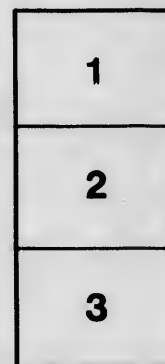
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LASHED TO THE MIZEN,
OR
A NIGHT OFF THE CAPE,

BY
FRANK JOHNSON,

OF EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY.

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Haud inexpertus loquor.

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LASHED TO THE MIZEN,
OR
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Haud inexpertus loquor.

Still remembered—in the winter—off the Cape of Good Hope,
When, lashed to the mizen by the slack of a rope,
The wind humming—howling—the sea mountain high—
I glanced at my home, far away, with a sigh.
“ Ah, mother,” said I—mourningly, “ if ever, again,
You should fold me in your arms—on the treacherous main
I would never go, a wanderer, away from your side,
For all the gold of India, whatever betide :
Nor, father, could again I but take you by the hand,
But again call you father, in my own honored land,
Should all the fabled treasures the ocean could give
Persuade me from you, more, with the foreigner to live.”
Thus mourned the heart of one that, too late, had grown wise,
Lashed to the mizen—looking round on the skies.

For life's worth, o'er the ocean scudding from our course,
For hours, not an hour but had heralded a worse,
The night waxing colder—the wind working stronger—
The seas, every surging, heavier and longer.

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Dark now had been the prospect had our ship been less in trim,
 All honor to the master, for that lay with him;
 Not a weak point about us—our running gear sound,
 Stouter, by a third, than if not winter bound—
 Our gallant masts lowered—our royal stowed away—
 Our rigging overhauled—every shroud, every stay—
 Hatches iron barred—anchors aboard—
 Our boats firmly lashed—every loose spar secured—
 New canvas in the courses—fore and top masts fished—
 Pump and helm gear in order—compass, all that could be wished—
 Guns sent below—water too, and handy—
 Bread in plenty in the lockers, and, perhaps—a *little brandy*—
 The Skipper knew the Cape, from many a nasty night,
 So all was as it *should* be—not a rope but was right.

Thirty-two, in all, we numbered, but one of foreign stock,
 A finer set of fellows never left the London dock;
 And fortunate it proved so, a less able crew,
 We'd hardly stood the night out we're now running through,
 Our registered tonnage but one nine four,
 Our boat needed handling, as seldom boat before,
 Though a neater, snugger barque never anchored off the Nore;
 No cumbersome cuddy—all but flush fore and aft,
 Ran the deck of that thorough British oak built craft;
 But scanty on the beam, her rolling was light,
 And the pump pin could tell every seam in her was tight;
 Achilles her name—a Southseaman—who'll say,
 The name was dishonored upon one night and day.

When first the breeze freshened but little cause to fear,
 The night promised fine—moon out—all clear,—
 With single reefed topsails, we were standing on our course,
 Dreaming of nothing immediate for the worse;
 But—the night still young—the scene was on the change,
 The seas rolled after us with a longer, bolder range,

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Betokening work to windward—the ship's glass
 Fell suddenly—and, hurriedly, there would pass
 By us, at intervals, a rude raking gust,
 Of ominous parentage, scattering, as dust,
 The crests of the scared waters—the, till now, staid moon
 Was racing in loose rack—and, one by one,
 The stars were disappearing,—with the waning light,
 The seafowl following, nestling, for the night,
 Astern in the ship's wake—the wind, till then,
 Southwest by West, warped Southerly, and again
 The glass was on the fall.—An anxious eye
 Was now upon the topsails—and by and bye
 The second mate's loud, manly, rousing cry,
 Of *all hands up on deck to shorten sail*,
 Told what was coming. Scarce warned, a frightening gale
 Was sweeping t'wards us—so terribly, so soon,
 Maturing in its strength, that, more as a typhoon,
 It fell aboard us. To the foretop yard,
 'Ere the wild, beating canvass was secured,
 Clung our good lads an hour. But now, some other hand
 I would, awhile, could take this pen's command—
 Some other hand, less pained than mine, to blaze
 Rashness where, recently, I owned but room for praise;
 A little honeyed task, at any time, to blame,
 Still less, when I recall where is *he* whom I name:
 Alone—on an isle—in a coral-reefed sea—
 With a scantling of earth over him—lics now—poor Lee.
 So draw a curtain round any error of that night,
 Let his care for us, otherwise, put that out of sight;
 Enough let it be, that the moment had past
 For anything, now, but to run it to the last;
 A dare-danger mate would have risked the laying-to,
 But the rest shook their heads, to the boldest of the crew;
 Had we hung, for a moment, but one thing could be,
 On our beam-ends, a wreck, at the mercy of the sea;

The captain looked vexed, but, he owned that to run
Was the only thing left us, in reason, to be done.

Lo! now, a very hurricane was hungering at our stern ;
The oldest on the ocean had something yet to learn ;
The drift, stifling, blinding, maddening, through the air,
All that the toughest, veriest tar could bear ;
Ourselves running onward, as racing with death,
Not the hardest, aboard, could face it and fetch breath.
Oh ! the humming, never-ceasing humming of the wind,
As it hugged to the shrouds—to ev'ry rope it could find—
As if upon the yards ten million million bees
Had settled, and were timing with the moaning of the seas ;
And oh ! through the din, the toll of the ship's bell,
Heard dully, like a far-off funeral knell.
Could life in me be lengthened to my thousandth year,
The toning of that night-knell would be still on mine ear,
And still upon my brain the impress of a night
So stamped with the Divinity, in all His might.

But now was the trial : on the starboard beam,
A point or two abaft, by the shifting gleam
Of the moon, we could mark, bearing t'wards us, a sea
So mountainous, so extended, it seemed to be
That, far as the eye could pierce, the ocean
Was up, and in one vast wave, in motion.—
Grandly it came.—Not a lip drew breath,
And who didn't pale—so at hand seemed death—
What some would have given, just then, for a day—
For an hour—for less—one, at least, could say.
Not long was it nearing us—time scarce for a prayer—
Barely time for the helmsmen to make them secure—
And then—then—then—God—God—right—right upon us ;
Every hand clenched at something, for—it threatened to drown us.

Crash—now to starboard—then—crash again ;
 The masts heeled and quivered, but—the stays stood the strain ;
 Our little barque paused a few seconds, to recover,
 And then—sprung ahead, as all danger was over.
 “ God bless thee, pretty boat,” “ Lord help thee, little rock,”
 More than one, as she rose, like a sea-bird from the shock ;
 Our quarter-boat had gone—but—as far as escape,
 Not a life-boat had served us, on that night, off the Cape ;
 Our boats, too, overhead, were stove, and cast loose,
 And the cook looked *something* when he missed his caboose ;
 Not a stanchion was left, from the quarter to the stem,
 Astern, on the swell, was the last we saw of them ;
 The sea broke the easier, as it ramped on the deck,
 But the ship—looked dangerous—and more like a wreck.
 And now, lads, look out for the lashing of loose ropes,
 One lash from a block'd brace had finished fears and hopes ;
 No surgeon at hand—a broken or bruised limb,
 Like the wild ones of the woods, must look, mainly, to Him,
 Not a tar but felt this, so, in some sort of way,
 Precaution was the rule with us all, night and day ;
 Every sailor, to the rashest, by the ropes held fast,
 Not a sea could be trusted that now swept past ;
 Racing onward, bare-poled, all the steersmen could do,
 As she yawed, hardly kept her from, at times, broaching to ;
 The swell was terrific—a simple wonder
 She didn't, as she dipped, run herself clean under.
 “ You had better,” said the Captain, “ get, Johnson, below.”
 I thanked him, but, declined—“ If the ship is to go,
 God's will,” said I, “ be done,—but—above board for *me*”—
 Poor hope gave a sigh—yet—there still was the sea.
 “ Think ye, Terry,” said he, then, to a fine old hand,
 Who, he knew, our position must well understand,
 “ Think ye, Terry, any chance if—we ventured—heaving to—
 I'm out, in my reckoning, altogether, what to do—
 She 'll never live it out, like this, the night through”—

—“ Well, Captain, said the veteran, his practised eye
 Running well up to windward, and then to the sky,
 “ Though God only knows how, perchance, it might be,
 I should leave well alone, Sir, if it lay with me—
 We'll never bring her round, Captain, 'gainst such a sea.”
 On the listen, well pleased—too plain was the danger,
 Though not bred a sailor, to the sea no stranger.
 The Skipper knew well that the old tar was right,
 He did'nt broach the subject again through the night.
 So, we stood to the wheel—it was all we could do—
 With the stoutest, the steadiest, the ablest of the crew.

For hours, after this, but little new to tell,
 The same humming—howling—the same fearful swell—
 The same funeral tolling of the ship's watch bell—
 The sea still hammering, thundering on the deck,
 Our ship, every hour, looking more like a wreck;
 All now was on a hair—had a rudder pin but broke,
 Ah, where had been *we* ere the day light woke,
 Ah, where had been then the hopes and the schemes,
 The poor heart's plannings, its promises, its dreams;
 Long, long were the hours of that never ending night,
 And drearier, every hour, the sound and the sight;
 But few were the words we said to one another,
 Though danger had endeared, each to each, as a brother;
 All thoughts were on the daylight—yet, when the dawning came,
 No solacing it brought—all comfortless the same—
 With the drapery of night, no longer, as a screen,
 More desolate, still, in the distance, the scene.
 Could the chaos before me have ever been calm,
 Had I ever laid my breast on it, and feared no harm;
 Was this the witching ocean that, a few days before,
 Had weaned me, and has since often weaned me from the shore,
 With its petrels, its pigeons, its grand albatross,
 Its airy azured wave, with its emulous toss,

Its albercore, bonita, and, nearer to the sun,
 Its fish upon the fly—a sight for every one—
 Now, lifeless—cheerless—not a bird upon the wing,
 Save God, and ourselves, not a single living thing,
 The snowy crested blue wavelet no longer there,
 Grey, lonely, and sweeping—desolate every where.

I 've rounded the world more than once since then,
 And many a dirty night, stood beside sailor men,
 But the sea, as it showed upon that night and day,
 I have never known since—heaven grant I never may.

Oh God—upon a bluff of some bold coast,
 To have seen our little barque on the seething billows tost,
 To have eyed her spring a-head, now, dip into the sea,
 Daring the worst—the very worst—that could be,
 Then, heading up, and onward, springing as before,
 As challenging the ocean, and rioting in its roar ;
 Ah, that had been a sight worth the seeing, I ween :
 Our little boat the soul—the very soul—of the scene ;
 But—lashed to the mizen—all the day—all the night—
 The waves washing over one—another, 'nother sight.

And, still, we were running—and the noon was nigh—
 And no alteration—no comfort in the sky—
 The sea drenching, drowning us, as cruelly as ever,
 Every limb upon the rack, every muscle on the quiver ;
 The wind none the worse, the sea still rose,
 With another night threatening us ! and, God only knows
 What such another night, with its trials, had done,
 For nature was wearying, to the eore, in every one ;
 I could judge by myself—I was numbing with the cold,
 Yet I was counted hard, and the sailors called me bold.
 We had stood to it well, but—no change at noon—
 No prospect of a change—and the night settling soon—
 Went sickening to us all—yet, few said a word,
 For the thoughts now, of most, were, seriously, with the Lord.

Think ye not the poor tar, thus beat, the less bold,
 Think ye rather of the wild wind—of the long wet night's cold ;
 Even Blackboy, our dog, a rough tearer from the Tyne,
 Till then—quite quiet, began now—to whine ;
 “ Ah, Blackboy,” I said, “ silly tyke, why fret ye,
 There'll be none to lament *you*—none to regret ye ! ”
 This roused me—anew, round the sea and the sky ;
 I passed a still searching, though forlorn hope, eye.
 “ There *must* be,” said I, wildly, “ there *must, must* be
 A hair yet to cling to,” but—none could I see ;
 It seeméd, as I listened to the chiming of the bell,
 Every chime, more and more, took the tone of—*farewell* :
 Ah, 'hen it was I found, as a tear began to flow,
 How very, *very* dear what has long, long been so.

Still, onward we went, for another full hour,
 If anything, the hurricane increasing in power,
 When, lo ! an hour more brought us to four bells—
 And then—was I wrong—it struck me that the swells
 Were easier, the humming in the ropes less loud,
 And I signalled to the captain, with his arm around a shroud ;
 And, ah ! a little more, and the sky began to give ;
 We eyed it as men would that were hungering to live,
 When suddenly—oh, God !—out came the blessed sun !
 It seeméd, at the moment, as the very, very One !
 Save the captain and the helmsmen (never idle with the seas),
 Every soul of us went, at once, upon his knees,
 With hands close clasped, as in worship, gazing
 Upon the blessed thing above all hearts praising.

Ye landsmen that have never stood a night out on deck,
 Still less, for your lifeblood, been clinging to a wreck,
 Seldom more than a ship's length from anything that's dear,
 And who think, perhaps, a sailor knows nothing of a tear,
 Ye can never, never tell what at that moment past
 In the heart of poor Jack, with the sun out at last ;

The storm still raging, the wind still humming—
 We knew what the sun meant—what was a-coming ;
 The angel of hope cut the threads of despair,
 And few cared to think of the danger still there ;
 To the finger ends, anew, the blood began to creep,
 And the bravest felt no shame that another saw him weep.

And where was the Captain ? still holding by a shroud.
 I hailed him—but the storm din was all too loud ;
 He was leaning, as wearied—his eye was to the sun,
 But his thoughts were away, as on something or some one ;
 The muscles of his face, too, I marked, were on the play,
 Some powerful feeling was fighting for its way,
 So, I loosed the lashing round me, and went to his side.
 The poor fellow, I knew, had been fearfully tried ;
 I took in mine his hand—it was cold—like my own.
 “Come, come, Lee,” I said, “we are none of us alone.”
 He failed, at first, to answer me—but, at last,
 His manhood returning—the temptation past.
 “Ah, Johnson,” he said—“I—I couldn’t for my life,
 A master of a ship has no business with a wife.”
 I pressed his hand, and struggled my own feelings to smother,
 When, he pressed mine, in turn, and—we looked at one another.

From then, to the sundown, the wind was on the case,
 Though terrible, still, the long, heavy, sweeping seas ;
 When lo— an hour more, a new danger at hand,
 We had run us on to soundings, though afar from all land ;
 No trifle was this—in a lion leaping sea,
 Broken water a trial as fearful as could be.
 Had we started a leak, with the deck all bare,
 The crew waxing weak, poor the prospect there :
 Oh, the creaking, the groaning, the trembling, the straining
 As if the very ship itself was complaining ;
 She never could have stood it, stroke after stroke,
 Had there been a bit about her but the best British oak,

Every moment it seeméd that the masts must go,
 But—again, in his mercy, God looked down, and said—*No!*
 So, we weathered it through, and, once in deep water,
 Our barque soon showed she knew what to be after.

The worst now over, Lee and I went below,
 As did others—for forward but few dared to go,
 And, shifting my clothes, I lay down in my berth,
 And felt, for that once, what a dry shirt was worth ;
 As you well may believe, my prayers were but short,
 Though, perhaps, what I *did* say, pretty near what I ought ;
 I was soon sound asleep—and, presently, where,
 Enough, if I say—no mizen mast was there,
 Not the heaviest sea that ever shook deck,
 Had loosed me, just then, from—some body's neck.

The dawning brought the Sabbath—when, a glorious sun
 Lit the heart up in all—and in every one,
 The first thought that woke, was, to meet, and in prayer,
 Thank God for his mercies denied no where ;
 So, the helmsman excepted, still in charge of the craft,
 We all, at four bells, to a man mustered aft,
 The Captain, at once, took his place at the table,
 With a right earnest will to do all he was able :
 He'd asked me, in the morning—I recall it with pride—
 To assist—so I went, and—stood by his side ;
 This gave me a chance of observing the crew,
 Which, from no idle motive, I was anxious to do ;
 More than commonly calm, they had never showed bolder,
 But it struck me that, in some way, every man looked older ;
 Nor excepting poor Blackboy, who had taken his stand,
 For a little quiet chat with an old friend's hand ;
 On such an occasion, this searched me to see,
 It was almost as much as “ A word too for *me.*”

The Captain now rose—in his hand a prayer book—
 In a moment there was something in every man's look,
 And at "Now let us pray" all reverently knelt,
 And, if ever prayer on earth was, that prayer was felt;
 And when the prayer was over, each rose, and by the hand
 Took his mates—in silence—for words were at a stand;
 God had friended us in trial such as none on board
 Remembered, and all hearts were brimming with the Lord:
 So, the Captain, for a while, gave over, till he saw
 We had mastered the moment—and ourselves once more—
 When scanning, somewhat cautiously, the pages of the *Book*,
 He paused upon a passage—the particular one he took
 Was of Noah and his ark—I remember this well—
 Of how the grace of God upon Noah and his, fell.
 At once, as by a charm, this chained our attention,
 That it reached us all home, too, needs barely the mention,
 More especially when reminded of the ark's three storeys,
 Which vividly recalled our own country's glories,
 The door at the side, perhaps, a little out of date,
 But when we come to hear how it fell to Noah's fate
 To weather the deep waters, and for all on board
 To be saved, by the special ordering of the Lord,
 Of how, as the waters subsided, a dove
 Was loosed, and returned with the branchlet of love,
 The picture was complete—and "just our case
 To a T" might be read in every face.
 How the captain came to hit it, so exactly on the head,
 A puzzle to us all—in his look might be read
 A pardonable pride—for all seemed to feel,
 That the right man, for once, had had hold of the wheel.

The Captain now turned to the "*gentleman aboard*"
 With a kindly put request, to assist with a word,
 To just—as a finish—I had promised so to do—
 To just say—a *little like*—a *something*—to the crew.

I was well pleased to do so—so loaded my heart,
 I was quite on the bend for unburdening, in part ;
 So, the Captain, very graciously, standing aside,
 I, at once took his place—and, with some little pride :
 The sailors, I could mark, were a tip-toe to see
 What canvass I'd carry—what my course would be.
 I soon set them easy, however, as to that,
 My discourse, by design, a mere brotherly chat ;
 I could guess pretty well upon what tack to reach them,
 They had just had a lesson One only could teach them ;
 With that for my compass, my card, all along,
 I should'nt, in my land falls, I knew, be very wrong ;
 So, I put us all, straight, in the worst of weather,
 And then did my best—for a good cry together ;
 I was right with my fold—no one could tell
 The shepherd from the sheep, by anything that fell.
 There was no veiled distinction between them and me,
 When I spoke of poor strayers, I took care it was—*WE* ;
 This seemed to hit home with them—perhaps it did,
 I spoke what I felt, only, nothing was hid.
 I took, too, the occasion I mind, to recall,
 What we owed to the Captain for his care of us all ;
 There was some little thing, too, about folks far away,
 Of storms all over—of a happy, happy day ;
 I forget the particulars, th' occasion was trying,
 But I marked—when done, more than one—had been crying.

The service now ended, in the quietest order,
 All took their departure, and not one aboard her,
 But, again, and unbidden by ship's cabin light,
 Came to pray, to thank God, for a calm quiet night ;
 So, I verily believe that none went away,
 But something the better for a hard night and day ;
 From the Captain to the cook, I noted, not a word
 Profanely, or impurely, for many a day, was heard ;

Not even to this hour, I can answer for *one*,
Is the mizen quite forgotten when the day's task is done.

I've often said since, to myself, when crossed
By any hardened reprobate, to all conscience lost,
You've never, my brave boy, by the slack of a rope,
Been lashed to the mizen, off the Cape of Good Hope.

