

Selections from  
**A sailor of fortune; personal memoirs of Captain B. S. Osbon**

BY ALBERT BIGELOW PAINE

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*(These selections make this read appropriate for all audiences.  
Full, original book—not here—is for mature audiences only, not children.)*

### **Foreword**

In preparing these chapters I have endeavoured faith-fully to preserve certain annals of a remarkable life. It has been my privilege to set them down from the lips of the narrator, only amplifying from such reports and records as would complete the pictures and give them connection and adequate setting.

In so far as possible the effort has been to retain the phraseology in which the stories were told to me, though no literary skill of mine could adequately reproduce the inimitable manner of the telling — the modulation of speech, the play of countenance, the subtle humour that was as often a matter of the inflection as of the word. These things the reader will have to imagine, each in his own way.

The book is history — some of it unwritten history heretofore — of our own land. Its subject has helped to make that history, and in thus allowing it to be recorded has added a further service to the nation he has served so faithfully and well.

--Albert Bigelow Paine

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### **Then and Now**

One reason why I have seen so much is this: when as a sailor I went ashore "on opportunity," instead of steering straight for a gin-mill I strolled off to get some idea of the port and of the manners and customs of the people. When I returned to the ship I was regarded as a sort of encyclopaedia of general information, and I kept my knowledge fresh by frequently turning it over. That is why I have remembered.

Another thing, — there was a good deal more to see in those early days. The steam and telegraph were unknown and strange things took place on the high seas, which never could happen in these days of shortened time and quick communication.

The Pacific Ocean was then a vast and almost uncharted mystery into which men and vessels disappeared, to be heard of no more for months, for years, perhaps forever. News was the rarest thing we knew — next, reading matter. A small piece of newspaper would be read and re-read by every sailor on board.

When we visited other ships it was called "gamming" and the first question asked was, "Have you seen any whales?" and then, "Have you anything to read?"

The Bible was read in our fore-castle, from end to end, seven times within a period of eighteen months. Messages from home — did not come. I was once absent five years and eight months and returned without knowing whether a single member of my family was alive.

You will see how different things were then. The ocean was a world unto itself — the law of the sea was not like the law of the land.

The story of much that happened in that time would be set down now as a "sailor's yam," but nothing which a sailor could invent would be more marvellous than the simple truth, and this, as I saw it, I shall try to tell.

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### **The Making of a Sailor**

My great-grandfather's name was Osborne — a manufacturer of com brooms at old Hadley, Massachusetts. In those days it was customary for broom-makers to use a burning-brand in marking their goods, and my ancestor, requiring one, sent for it to Boston. There is no doubt but that he was a very poor penman. The maker of brands deciphered his name as "Osbon," and thus it was spelled on the brand which in due time reached Hadley.

Now it was a long journey to Boston and back in those days, and the season was far advanced. More- over, burning-brands were expensive. The old gentleman was anxious to get his goods on the market and could afford

neither the time nor the money for another experiment, so he changed his name to fit the burning-brand.

It is a curious thing that the branch of the family which adopted this abbreviated name has been of an entirely different brand from those who retained the two missing letters. Perhaps I might mention here that my great-grandmother was the first white woman born in Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

For myself, I was born of poor but Methodist parents, August 1 6th, 1827, at Rye, Westchester County, New York, and was the son of a minister, who in those days moved every year. Perhaps it was because of this that I inherited a roving disposition.

I spent every summer of my childhood life at my great-grandfather's farm in Saratoga County, where the battle of Bemis Heights was fought. At the time a great many Indians lived in that section of the State, and a large number had quartered themselves on my great-grandfather's domains. In fact, we saw more Indians than we did white folk.

They grew to be very fond of me and used to take me off to their camp; and I was fond of going in their canoes. They made me for my special use a little birch-bark craft, probably five or six feet long.

I soon became an adept in canoe paddling, and when they missed me at the house they would send one of the men over to the camp after me, and I was usually found in a canoe. This was my first experience in navigation.

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### **The Beginning of a Great Voyage**

THE ship Junior, Captain Silas Tinkham, cleared from the port of New Bedford on the 13th day of December, 1847, with a crew of twenty-two men before the mast, all greenhorns except " Old Bill," an English man, a Kanaka, and myself. Then there were the captain, three mates, four boat steerers, cooper, carpenter, and a negro cook — the last named being the only man I ever met in all my seafaring who was born in Rye, New York, my own native town.

The Junior was a little ship — about three hundred and seventy-eight tons register, and a trifle over a hundred feet long. Such a craft to-day could be stored as long boat on the deck of an ocean liner, yet she had a capacity when full of oil of about four thousand barrels, carried four boats and four years'

rations for thirty-three men. after some months' cruising we made our way to Angier Point, on the island of Java.

Soon after our arrival I was seized with a very severe attack of the Java fever and it was not believed that I could pull through. Captain Tinkham had loaded me full of calomel; but it was no use, and I had my shipmates carry me on deck to look at the sun for the last time.

A Malay merchant was on board, and, looking at me, said: " Bury him on shore and draw out fever." Then he told them how to do it, and I was taken ashore, and under a huge banyan tree buried up to my neck in the warm earth in a comfortable sitting position, with an awning over my head, and two shipmates, a Malay and a Dutch [man], to look after my comfort and protection.

The latter was necessary, for there was a water conduit nearby where tigers often came down to drink, and it was not a comfortable thought. Neither did I relish the idea of bugs and worms that might be creeping through the soil, but my Malay friend assured me that such was the poison of the fever absorbed by the soil that no insect would remain near me.

Well, I stayed nearly two days in that hole, and the first night a tigress and two cubs did come for water, and there was anxiety and excitement enough in our camp before the creatures were put to flight to throw me into a profuse perspiration, which no doubt was beneficial — at all events the natives said so, and sure enough the fever was all gone.

I was removed from [that place] in a very weak condition, taken on board, and in a few days was nearly well. I have heard of a similar treatment recently adopted in our own country for various diseases, and I think it may be safely recommended. The earth is a great disinfectant and healer.

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## **Into the Antarctic**

We had no reliable charts of those waters, knew nothing of the character of the navigation, and not a man on board, fore or aft, had been within the polar circle. But in those days nothing daunted the skipper, who steered into unknown waters, without charts and with imperfect means of navigation. By frequent use of the lead we hoped to avoid danger from grounding, but we had no idea what other perils we were to encounter.

The first two weeks of the cruise were uneventful. The wind was fair and we ran southward rapidly. Then presently we entered a melancholy region where the temperature dropped rapidly and there were masses of floating ice and dismal fogs.

Many days we did not see the sun at all, and as we were subject to strange drifts and unknown currents it was often impossible to tell where we were going. We now entered a region of fearful cold, and gales that followed each other in rapid succession.

In the meantime we were drifting, no one could tell whither. For weeks we were tossed about this dreary waste, striving at last to retrace our course only to be carried among a multitude of icebergs, enormous in size and of threatening aspect.

It was a weird world that we had penetrated, a part of the globe unpeopled by any human beings except ourselves— thirty-three isolated souls in waters that had no history. We youngsters did not realise all the danger, but still we were an anxious crew.

The weeks passed and there came no favouring wind. We began discussing the probabilities of spending an Antarctic winter. There were rations enough, such as they were, but there was no way to place the vessel in a comparative degree of safety.

The outlook was gloomy indeed, when suddenly to the joy of all there came a shift of wind, and with every yard of canvas spread, including studding sails, and with the ship's head pointed northward, we began our return voyage.

With a lookout for open water at the masthead, from dawn to dusk the ship was pressed on her course, and never in her history was sail carried on her as it was on that memorable trip.

We had a fortnight of favourable weather and had left the ice behind when we ran into a terrible storm, but finally made our way to Lord Howe's Island, off the Australian coast, where we wooded, watered, and laid in a stock of potatoes.

We were glad to be back from that gloomy sea below the circle, but within three days we were again under way. So away we went for the other end of the world.

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We touched at the Island of Rotumah, one of the Fiji group, and the liberty crew went ashore one morning, each with several yards of calico, and a handful of odd trinkets for trading.

Judge of our surprise to find that the natives would not barter with us — a thing unknown before. When they invited us toward a nearby hill we went with some hesitation, for those were dangerous islands in the South Sea.

We went, however, and soon discovered a large thatched hut, capable of holding four or five hundred people, and into this many persons were making their way. We entered with them and were escorted to the front and given seats on a mat.

Then a man arose and said something which we did not understand. The audience also rose and began to sing. The words were unintelligible, but the tune we at once recognised as that of a familiar hymn. Then followed what was evidently a prayer, another hymn, and an address or sermon.

By this time we remembered that it was the Sabbath, and saw we were in a house of worship. After the service we were taken to the chief's house and entertained.

We wondered how this island had become Christianised, for there were no missionaries. Many years after in London, at a meeting of missionaries, I learned the story.

It seems that a long time before our visit, a little boy who had been badly treated on a British ship ran away on this island, taking his Bible — always the mother's parting gift in those days — with him. He fled to the mountains, and after the ship had left, came down into the village, and was kindly treated by the chief and admitted to his family.

He learned the language, became a preacher of the Gospel and converted the island to Christianity before a white missionary ever landed on that soil.

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Captain Tinkham headed the Junior for home, after an absence of nearly eighteen months, covering more territory and more remarkable territory in that time than any other vessel that had ever sailed the sea, having been beyond both the polar circles in a single voyage.

It was over three years before I reached home, and I had many adventures in that time.

I joined the whale ship Joseph Maxwell, Captain Ezra T. Rowland, of Fairhaven, Massachusetts. The Maxwell was about the size of the Junior, and her skipper a good man. [I] was assigned to the captain's boat.

We put into Lord Howe's Island — my second visit to that spot — for potatoes. Somewhat later we touched at a small island in the Fiji group for water and wood — the latter for fuel.

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It was during the cruise of the Maxwell that I made my first entry into theatrical life. It was in the early days of George Christy, and we organised a troupe of minstrels after the Christy pattern, with such success that we not only entertained ourselves but the crews of other vessels.

Upon our return to Sydney were engaged to perform at the theatre; the town was placarded, and for a week we drew crowded houses, receiving twenty pounds per night for the company of fifteen — more money than any one of us had ever seen before to call his own.

It was the first minstrel show ever given in Australia. I now spent several weeks in Sydney, seeing much and visiting many places of interest in the neighbourhood. Eventually I joined the ship Oneco, of Duxbury, Massachusetts, Captain Drew commanding.

The Oneco had come from Boston, loaded down with gold hunters for the California mines, and her deck houses had been fitted up for passengers. The crew now occupied these luxuriously fitted quarters, ate from real plates and slept in rooms instead of in the forecabin of common sailor life. The vessel was bound for Manila. I was the only sailor on her not born on Cape Cod.

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### **By a Long Passage I Reach My Native Land**

At Honolulu I shipped in a little English schooner, the Twilight, and made a direct passage back to Hong-Kong, stopping nowhere. I now began to have yearnings for home.

I had seen most of the world, had had adventure of almost every sort, and no word from my kindred for four years. I was glad to get to Hong-Kong as a starting point.

The William Henry Harbeck, Captain Shinn, was in port, and, owing to the scarcity of sailors, offered me fifty dollars a month in gold to ship with him — the highest price I ever was paid for sailing before the mast. We sailed for Liverpool some weeks later and arrived without accident

At Liverpool I met an old mate named Canfield, who had abandoned the sea to become the American Samson, or strong man, at the old Polytechnic Theatre. I went with him every night to the show, assisted the property man and finally entered the pantomime, taking the part of a fisherman with a stuffed fish, this being my second dramatic experience.

Eventually I surrendered the stuffed fish to play the part of a clown and burlesque Samson's performance. From Liverpool we went over to Dublin, where we played a successful two weeks, then returned to Liverpool, where I closed my histrionic career.

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The ship Henry Clay — the famous packet ship of that time — came into port in command of Captain Francis M. French, with whom I had made my first ocean voyage, in the Cornelia, and I resolved to return with him to my native land. She was crowded with emigrants and so far as I could see there had been little improvement in the years since my first experience.

[At last] I set foot on American soil once more after an absence of five years and eight months. I knew nothing as to the situation of my people — didn't even know where they lived. We had landed at Pier 9, North River, and about ten in the morning

I came up Rector Street to Broadway, where I stooped and put my hand on the ground to be sure, after all my years of absence and adventure, that I was really on my native soil. I never pass there now that I do not pay tribute to that spot.

New York was a small city then. The lower part of Broadway was still residential and every house in Bowling Green a mansion. But there had been changes in my absence, and I strolled up Broadway staring at the signs.

When I reached the corner of Ann Street, I remembered that Bangs and Mervin, the booksellers, were located there, and would know where my



parents lived. So I climbed the stairs and after some difficulty was permitted to see Mr. Lemuel Bangs.

When he learned who I was he looked at me and said: "Well, my boy, where did you come from? Your poor parents' hearts are almost broken. They have about given you up as dead."

I told him briefly of my travels and he informed me that my grandfather lived in Yorkville, now East Eighty-sixth Street, and my father in Newburgh. I said, "Mr. Bangs, you will have to let me have some money to get to grandfather's."

He replied, "I suppose you are like other sailors. You have earned your money hard and thrown it away easy."

That rather nettled me and I answered, "I have not been paid off yet from the Henry Clay; but if you are afraid to trust me with a dollar, will you please cash this draft," and I pulled out a bill of exchange for eight hundred dollars and laid it before him. He gave me a silver dollar then, and told me to go to "Mat" Gooderson's in Park Row, where the Yorkville stage started.

The stage had just arrived when I reached Mat's and I mounted the driver's box. When we got to Yorkville he pointed out the house where my grandfather lived, and when I climbed the steps I saw his name on the door. An Irish servant girl answered my knock and after some delay my aunt appeared, but did not recognise me.

I explained that I had just returned from sea and had a message for Mr. Sillick (my grandfather); whereupon she at once asked me if I had met her nephew anywhere during my travels. I replied that I had — that he would be home soon; also that I had seen him in Liverpool, ready to take the first ship.

My grandmother, meantime, had been listening over the banisters in the hall, and now came down. The moment she set eyes on me, she recognised me, for my face was the counterpart of my mother's.

I was tired that night and went to bed early. Meantime, without telling me, they had telegraphed my father, who merely told my mother that he had business in the city and came down to Yorkville, arriving about midnight. In the morning I awoke early to find a stranger in my bed, but when I lit a match to see who it was, who should it be but my own father.

We spent that morning in cashing my draft and putting me into some respectable garments for life ashore. In the afternoon we went by rail to Fishkill and crossed over the river to Newburgh, it being then about dusk.

My mother seeing me in the dim hall with my father mistook me for a visitor and greeted me as "Brother" Van Name of Albany, to whom I bore considerable resemblance.

Then she hurried away to get the supper, and I did not see her again until we sat down to the table. Even then she did not notice me, until grace was said, when turning suddenly she looked at me steadily for an instant and then jumped up and threw her arms about my neck — and you will have to guess the rest, for I can't tell it.

But the shore had little charm for me. Even my native land and my home could not hold me when, about six weeks after my return, I had an opportunity to make a voyage to Havana, a part of the world I had not seen. I was with the bark Parodi at this time— a very swift vessel. We made a passage from New York to Havana in four days and eighteen hours.

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### **On the Coast of Ireland**

Returning to New York, I joined the bark Louisa Kilham, and in her made several voyages to Kingston, Jamaica, thence to London, eventually becoming her captain.

On one trip, after discharging cargo we went to Newcastle, England, to load gas coal for New York, and the agent, anxious to secure a larger commission, against my protest loaded the vessel far too deep.

We went "north about " — that is, up the North Sea, past the Orkney Islands — to shorten the passage, it being the latter part of November when we sailed.

On entering the Atlantic Ocean we were met by a succession of fierce gales and it was impossible to work the ship to the westward. For days we battled with the storm. Finally the ship sprung a leak, our sail were blown away and we had a most terrible time.

The water gained on us very fast, and the men's hands were covered with running sores from their constant work at the pumps. It seemed impossible to save the ship.

Finally the crew refused duty. It was just about noon and I was attempting to get our position from the sun as it appeared from time to time from beneath the flying clouds. The mate came over to where I was and said,

"Captain Osbon, the men are utterly discouraged and refuse to pump any longer."

I asked him to tell them to wait until I had worked up the ship's position. When that was done, I would ask them to come aft in a body. My intention was to plead with them once more to stick to the pumps. If they failed in this, our hope was gone, and I would request them to kneel in a last prayer.

On sending for them, the crew came into the cabin, and I told them that where there was life there was hope, and begged them to go to the pumps again. They gave me a sorrowful but decided "No." Then I had an inspiration.

"Well, boys," I said, "let's ask God to help us." And taking up a Bible that always lay on the cabin table, I added, "I will open at random, and read the first verse that my eye falls upon."

Sailors in those days had great respect for the Bible. The men stood in perfect silence as I picked up the volume. I opened it entirely by chance, and my eye fell on the tenth verse of the forty-first chapter of Isaiah. I read aloud as follows:

"Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." (Isaiah 41:10)

I read no more, and stood and looked at the men for a moment, when one old sailor said, "Boys, let's go back to the pumps. That's a message from God to us, and He never lied. I believe he will fulfil this promise."

They did go back and it was not many hours until the wind shifted and went down, the sea moderated, and on the 23d of December, 1856, we entered the harbour of Queenstown and came to anchor after having been buffeted about on the coast of Ireland for twenty-seven days, pumping the Western Ocean through the ship.

I immediately employed a gang of 'longshoremen' to come off and man the pumps and sent my men to the forecabin, where they slept undisturbed until next morning.

Then the underwriter's surveyors came aboard and the ship was ordered to the Royal Victoria Dockyard at Passage West, which lies about midway between Queenstown and Cork. There she received orders to discharge her cargo, go into dry dock and strip.

The main and mizzenmasts were sprung and had to be taken out, and we remained at Passage West over four months.

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An amusing incident happened while our repairs were being completed. In the time that had passed between our arrival and St. Patrick's Day I had made many good friends and had received very handsome treatment.

When the great day arrived, therefore, I was determined to show my respect for the country as well as my appreciation of the extraordinary hospitality, and I ordered made for me a gorgeous Irish flag, and at sunrise had the ship gaily dressed, while from the main royal masthead the banner and the harp of Erin tailed out on the breeze.

The sight gave a vast joy to the townspeople, who arrived in delegations to congratulate me on my flag display and to contribute certain brands of the "old stuff" — a barrel of which was guaranteed not to contain a single headache.

But there is a fly in every ointment. Along about ten o'clock in the morning a twelve-oared cutter from the British guardship pulled alongside the dock, a middy with half a dozen blue-jackets landed, and to my surprise came aboard.

There were about a dozen or more townspeople around me when the diminutive representative of the Queen approached me and in a funny, pompous voice asked, "Who is the master of this ship?"

"I am that person," I acknowledged, vastly impressed by his manner.

"To what am I indebted for this formal visit?"

Pointing to the green flag above us he said:

"You will haul that down instantly, sir, or I will order my men to do it for you!"

I suppose I ought to have been very much frightened at this fierce command. Possibly I was. I know I was a good deal amused.

"Well, what's the matter with the flag?" I asked. "Are you aware that this is an American ship and that you have no right on these decks without my permission? Take it easy, sonny, and tell me what's wrong with the flag."

"Well," he snapped, "that flag has no crown over the harp, and my orders are to have it hauled down. Do you understand?"

"I think I gather the idea," I admitted. "I've heard better English than yours, but you mean well enough."

I now called one of my men and had the flag lowered. As it reached the deck I said to the middy, "There, little man, the flag's down. Now run along and learn politeness."

As soon as he was gone I had a couple of my men make from yellow cloth two of the smallest crowns ever seen over a harp — the harp being fully three feet long, while the crowns were less than the same number of inches.

These were sewed, one on each side of the offending flag, which, within an hour after it had been lowered, again went to the masthead amid the cheers of a throng of shore folk who had gathered to see what I was going to do, and who now crowded on board to join in a Patrick's Pot of celebration.

It was about one o'clock when a boat was reported coming up the river, heading for the docks. The news spread like wildfire, and the people came rushing from their dinners to see how the Yankee skipper was going to act.

This time a young lieutenant headed the boat's crew. As they reached the gangway, I leaned over the side, and was hailed.

"Good-day, sir, are you the master of the ship? If so, I would like a word with you."

I replied in the affirmative and the officer tripped up the gangway. We exchanged cap courtesies, and he said,

"My commanding officer sent a message this morning to inform you that you cannot fly the Irish flag in port, and that it must be hauled down. I have no desire to do anything unpleasant, but I must obey orders."

"But," I replied, "the middy who came said that the objection was that no crown was over the harp, and this fault I have remedied."

The gentlemanly lieutenant gazed aloft and shifted his position, but he was not able to distinguish the emblem that was in dispute. Then he asked permission to call one of his men aboard, but the sailor's eyesight was no better. In fact no one could distinguish the little crowns at such an elevation.

I now ordered one of my men to haul down the banner for a second time and spread it upon the deck — the great Irish harp with the funny little crown above.

The lieutenant stared at it a minute; then he said:

"My dear fellow, that crown is all out of proportion to the harp. You could not distinguish it five feet away — much less at the masthead."

"But the crown is there," I insisted." Of course we have no naval book of instruction on how to build flags, and I may have made the crown on it a little out of proportion; but it's there, according to orders. Hoist the flag again, boys!"

The poor lieutenant looked a bit puzzled, and after thinking a minute said, "Good-day, Captain, I'll return to the ship and make my report."

I offered to share a Patrick's Pot with him, but he said he must hasten back, and left the vessel. As the crowd saw his boat leave our side they set up a wild cheering, and many Patrick Pots went around that afternoon, in sight of the old banner of Erin.

A few days later an invitation came from the commanding officer of the guardship to dine with him on board the vessel. I went and met a jolly old captain, who greeted me most cordially, and introduced me to a choice lot of jovial fellows. We had a grand time, and I was asked to tell the story of the crownless and crowned flag, and I think everybody enjoyed the incident.

When a few weeks later we left Ireland, the whole town bade us Godspeed, and waved us a parting. The dock was a cloud of handkerchiefs, while from windows, sheets, tablecloths, petticoats, anything that could be seen, went streaming on the wind.

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Steam was now beginning to be the thing. The Collins line, between New York and Liverpool, had been established and Commodore Vanderbilt was ready. I decided to give up sailing for steam and looked about for a berth.

Going aboard the Northern Light, I explained my errand to Captain Tinklepaugh, whom I knew.

"Why, Captain," said he, "What under the sun do you want to leave a good thing for? You will have to begin at the foot of the ladder in a steamer. I'd like to have you, but the only post open on this vessel is that of quartermaster. I want a quartermaster."

My reply was, "Captain, you've got a quartermaster, right here."

I was willing to accept this inferior position to get a knowledge of steam sailing, and the ways of steam sailors. My sole duties were to steer the vessel (taking my trick at the wheel with three other quartermasters), to attend to the signals, to clean the brass work in the pilot house, and, when in port, to stand watch at one of the gangways.

It was quite a come-down from being master of a ship, but my reasons for accepting the berth were sound, as events proved. My first voyage in the Northern Light was across the Atlantic, and it was also her first to Southampton, Havre, and Bremen.

On my return to New York I was offered position as fourth mate in the steamship Moses Taylor — Captain John McGowan — engaged in the trade between New York and Aspinwall — now Colon — in connection with the Panama Railway.

Captain McGowan proved a lifelong friend and was really my father in steam shipping. Under his command I rose steadily to the position of chief officer. One of my voyages in the Moses Taylor still presents itself as a vivid memory.

One morning about two o'clock a quartermaster came to where I stood near the pilot house and said, very quietly,

"Mr. Osbon, the ship is on fire."

"Where is it?" I asked.

"In the lamp room, forward."

The lamp room was on the steerage deck, where were quartered between seven hundred and eight hundred returning California miners.

The quartermaster had already informed the chief engineer, who had set the pumps going. I now ordered the vessel put before the wind so the fire would not blow through her, ran aft and told Captain McGowan, so that he might take charge of the deck.

There was no noise made — no alarm of any sort; but when we reached the hold we were unable to unlock the lamp room door. This necessitated the use of an axe, and the noise, with the volume of smoke that poured out, aroused the sleeping passengers. In a moment they were panic-stricken, jumping out of their berths and blocking the gangways.

Meantime the crew had got the hose into the lamp room, and within two minutes the fire was out. I informed the passengers of this fact and ordered

them to remain in their berths until the apparatus was removed and the slop and dirt cleared away.

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I continued in the steam trade about two years, and besides the Northern Light and Moses Taylor, held positions on the St. Louis, Illinois, and on the Gautemala — Captain J. M. Dow — a ship that made the first voyage around the Horn from New York to Panama without touching at any port for coal.

We went through the Straits of Magellan, and my notes of this passage were used for several years by other steamers that went that route. We reached Panama in fifty-two days from New York — a notable trip.

On the Guatemala, also, we had a fire. The ship was loaded with nothing but coal — much of it in the between decks, stowed in gunny bags. The third assistant engineer went down one night with a petticoat-lamp and in some manner set fire to the bagging.

Immediately the gunny cloth was in flames and he came out of the hold half suffocated. It was my watch below at the time, but I was wakened by the tramping on deck and hastily dressing came up to find the smoke pouring out of the forehatch in dense volumes.

It was almost impossible to go down there, and the boats were provisioned and swung clear, ready to leave the ship. We were then about four hundred miles off the coast of Brazil.

Yet we did fight that fire, going down in relays, each for a few minutes, and coming to the deck for fresh air. It was two o'clock when we began, and by eleven next morning we had it extinguished. There was no riot or panic — we had no passengers — but it was a thankful lot of men who realised that escape.

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### **I Make a Venture into the Lecture Field and Embark in Newspaper Work**

The course of a man's life is usually altered by trifles — or at least what seem to be such — and it was through the merest accident that I now found myself following a walk of life which in my wildest dreams I had never even contemplated — that of a public lecturer. It came about in this wise:

A lecture course was in progress at Yorkville — now East 86th Street, as before mentioned. The Rev. Henry Ward Beecher was to be the speaker on a



certain night, which proved so stormy that, in those days of poor transportation, the prospect of a journey from Brooklyn was enough to discourage the stoutest heart.

At all events, Mr. Beecher did not appear, and somebody in the audience (and in spite of the storm a pretty good one had gathered) proposed that Captain Osbon spin a yarn. To please the audience, and to earn the promised stipend, I ascended the platform for the first time in my life.

I must have succeeded, for the next day the young men of the village (as it was then) suggested that I give a lecture in Wakeman Hall. The boys promised to lend a helping hand — the post office sold tickets, and when I entered the hall it was packed.

The only face I missed was that of my own father. I had given him and my mother tickets, but they did not wish to come, and see me fail. Still my father could not resist. I had scarcely commenced when I saw his cloak, and his face above it. He slipped into the hall and sat down behind the stove.

Now, I had prepared my lecture with care, and in manuscript form. Imagine my feeling when I got on the platform and felt in my pockets for it and found it missing. It was a trying moment, but I don't think anybody noticed my difficulty.

I went ahead, just as I had done a few evenings before, only on a heavier scale. I do not think I shall be boasting if I say that the audience was spellbound — first with curiosity, then with the story of my travels. I was full of all that I had seen, and I told it in a way that perhaps made some of them think they had seen it, too. But I kept my eye on my father. In fact I talked at my father.

At last the old gentleman got up, left his seat behind the stove and came up farther front. The nearer he got, the more I warmed to my subject, and when I finished I think everybody was satisfied.

I certainly was, for the doorkeeper turned over the proceeds, which were between sixty and seventy dollars, and with this tied up in a handkerchief I went home to receive amazed congratulations from my parents, especially my father, who had never received so much for one of his excellent sermons.

"My boy," he said, "where did you learn to talk like that?" Then he counted the money over and over. I believe he thought he was dreaming and would soon wake up.

I put in three months lecturing after that. I was my own booking and billing agent, and in some instances my own treasurer up to the moment of

going to the platform. I painted my own posters in water colours, and put them up at night so as to preserve ray dignity as the chief attraction.

I appeared in churches and lyceums, and told [stories of my travels] according to my audience. I had a varied experience that winter; but I cleared eight hundred dollars in the three months, and had a good deal of enjoyment besides.

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While on my lecture tour I was frequently asked by country editors to sit down in the office and write something about my entertainment. I was glad to do this, and little by little acquired a taste for seeing my work in public print.

When the New York Conference met in New York in May I attended its regular sessions as I had been accustomed to do in boyhood, and there met an old schoolmate who was reporting the Conference for the Commercial Advertiser, then edited by Francis Hall.

My friend, being suddenly taken ill and knowing that I was familiar with Conference proceedings, asked me to finish his copy for that session, instructing me how to turn it in to the paper. Mr. Hall complimented me on my afternoon's work and directed me to continue through the Conference, at the end of which he paid me a liberal sum — for those days.

I now surrendered all other ambitions for newspaper work. I liked it and I found it easy. For a time I wrote for most of the New York papers, combining marine and theological subjects in a manner which the editors must have found satisfactory.

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### **I Meet the Prince of Wales, and Enjoy His Friendship**

It was in October, 1860 that the Prince of Wales, under the guidance of the Duke of Newcastle, made his visit to this country. He arrived on the nth at the Battery, and his reception was an extraordinary affair.

The Harriet Lane, a revenue cutter commanded by Captain John Faunce, had been turned over to the Prince and his suite by President Buchanan in person, for his special use while in our waters. She was a craft of great beauty, well adapted to royal service and functions, and became really the floating headquarters of the Prince.

He had used her in his journey from Washington to Richmond, Baltimore, and Philadelphia, and on the morning of October nth she met the royal visitors at South Amboy and conveyed them to the Battery, where they were welcomed by about the most enthusiastic crowd that this or any other nation ever saw.

The royal party had engaged a suite of fifteen rooms at the Fifth Avenue Hotel — the corner suite on the second floor, fronting Fifth Avenue and Twenty-third Street — and the reception parade up Broadway was the most imposing affair New York had known up to that time. Every flag and piece of bunting on Manhattan Island is said to have been unfurled that day.

Every balcony was a mass of ladies, with big hoop-skirts which made them look like inverted balloons jammed together. Every piece of coping and cornice was seen fringed with heads of men and boys, who clung there for hours waiting for the procession to pass.

The street below was a mass of people, and when the cortege did come it was almost impossible for it to make its way along. One of the papers said that a tide of quicksilver could not have slipped through that crowd.

The parade was late leaving the Battery, and it was after dark before it reached the Fifth Avenue Hotel, but nobody begrudged the time. The spectators were glad that the procession had to move slowly so they could get a good long look at the Prince. He rode in a barouche, bought especially for the occasion by liveryman Van Raust at the "vast expenditure of one thousand dollars " and drawn by six black horses.

He was a boy of only nineteen then, fair and slender, and the women went simply mad when they looked down on his pretty young face. When he reached the Fifth Avenue Hotel it was almost impossible to steer him through the tossing billows of crinoline.

Women pulled and jammed and crowded to get a closer view, and struggled to get near enough to touch his royal person. One large lady who had worked her way to the front seized him by the arm as he passed.

"Be you the Prince?" she demanded. "Be you the Prince?"

"I am, Madam," he answered and dashed frantically up a convenient stair. The big woman turned and faced the crowd, wild with happiness. "I seen him an' I touched him," she cried joyously.

A little boy who was held up for view called out, "Why, Pa, he's only a man!" and that expressed a good deal of the general idea that the Prince of

Wales was something more than just a handsome, good-natured, generous boy — one of the best young fellows in the world.

Eventually I met the Prince in person and became his friend. This is how it happened:

We were on board the Harriet Lane, which was always at hand during his stay, and a number of visitors were present, including guests, reporters, and Mr. Archibald, our British Consul, whom I knew very well indeed.

In those days I wore a very long beard — one that would seem to have attracted even the eye of royalty — for the Prince singled me out and inquired of Mr. Archibald who was the gentleman with the enormous growth of whiskers. Mr. Archibald told him and asked if he would like to have the World reporter presented. His reply was favourable, and I was formally presented to England's present king.

Beardless boy as he was, I think I suspected that he wanted to get the secret of my hair tonic. At all events we became good friends from the start. Every day he used to single me out and we talked together.

I was with him daily up to the time of his departure, he always having a pleasant word and usually a good many questions concerning the people about us.

I went with the Prince to West Point on the Harriet Lane, October 15, and remained with him until his return to his native land. When we parted he shook hands as with an old friend and cordially invited me to come and see him whenever I was on the other side of the water.

I had seen him once before as a child with his mother, on my first visit to Liverpool in the Cornelia, and I was to see him more than once, later. He always seemed to me just what a prince should be — a beautiful child, a generous, noble boy, a perfect English gentleman.

It was not until 1869 that I saw him again. I was then in Paris, and the Prince of Wales was there attending the races. He was a man of the world by this time, but the same unpretentious good fellow I had known as a boy.

I was passing down the street with Rear Admiral Gregory's son and two or three other young Americans, when we came to the Jockey Club, I said,

"The Prince of Wales is in there — I'm going in to see his royal highness."

Somebody said, "Dollars to doughnuts you don't." I took out my card and went up to the attendant at the door and said,

"I should like to see the Prince of Wales."

He looked me over and referred my card to some higher flunkey, and in time it reached an official who came out and asked what business I had with the Prince.

I replied that I was with him during his visit to the United States, and that when we parted he invited me to call if I came across the water. I think the guard was a little dubious about my story; but he took my card and presently returned and ushered me into the royal presence.

My long whiskers had been replaced by a Napoleonic goatee and moustache, but he remembered me in a moment, got up from his chair, met me with a cordial handshake, asked me to be seated, and pushed the carafe my way. Then he said:

"Well, how's Captain John Faunce?" Faunce, as will be remembered, commanded the Harriet Lane and was always a great favourite of his.

We chatted fully half an hour, and when I left he renewed his invitation to visit him in London.

I may say here that I availed myself of the Prince's invitation more than once in after years, always finding him the same. ... kindness of heart and friendly spirit for one who could be of no possible service to him.

I have always been deeply grateful to my old friend, who is now His Majesty, Edward VII., King of England.

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It was on February 19th, 1861, that Abraham Lincoln reached New York on his inaugural journey from his home in Springfield to Washington. He came by the way of Albany, Troy, and Poughkeepsie, making short speeches at each stop, and was hailed by thousands of shouting people as the Moses who was to lead them from the wilderness of obscure paths, and impending perils.

At each place he assured them quietly and gently that he would do what he believed to be right and for the best, and the impression that he made was deep and lasting.

At Thirtieth Street between Ninth and Tenth Avenues, New York City, the new Hudson River Railway Station was thrown open for the first time that day.

The engine of the presidential train was decked as gaily as a bride, and at three o'clock, p. m., it slowly drew its precious freight through the cheering multitude to the platform.

From here the grand procession to the Astor House equalled even that of the Prince of Wales, every street being a mass of banners and bunting and cheering throngs. Whatever of disloyalty there was in New York, and there was plenty of it, did not manifest itself on that day.

I saw Mr. Lincoln in person at the Astor House that night. I was not detailed to interview him for the World, but went over of my own accord.

I was ushered into his presence and introduced myself, stating that I was an old traveller. I shall never forget his appearance or his position. He leaned his right elbow on the mantelpiece, and his face wore a sad, care-worn look, as if he would be glad to be let alone.

He straightened himself up and asked me where I had travelled. I replied, "All over the world — came near getting to both poles in one voyage," adding that I had spent most of my life on the ocean, and had now drifted into journalism for the reason that I liked an "all night in" once in a while.

Tired as he evidently was, he seemed interested in my chat, which perhaps was a change from the political and personal questions which had been put to him throughout his travels. I was still telling him my adventures when the newspaper men appeared. Then he talked to them.

I saw Mr. Lincoln many times after that. He remembered me instantly, and asked some particulars about an incident I had previously narrated. From that time I counted him as one of my friends, and such he proved. He was always ready with an amusing tale, some anecdote to illustrate his point.

It was my first talk with him at the Astor House that I remember most vividly. There before me stood the man upon whom the fate of a nation rested. There in his face was written all the sad forecast and resolution of the coming struggle. In a little speech made next day, I think, he said:

"When the time comes, I shall take the ground that I think is right — right for the North, for the South, for the East, for the West, for the whole country." That was what I saw written in his face — the resolve that, come what would, misunderstanding, bitterness, and tragedy, he would take the ground he considered right, and he would maintain it to the end.

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Fort Warren being located on an island, it was not thought probable that I could reach the mainland.

Yet this was what I decided to do. The morning after my interview with the kindly disposed servant I went for a walk on the beach.

It was blowing a living gale of wind, and nobody but a fool or a sailor would attempt to cross the harbour in a small boat on such a day. To me, however, the only difficulty was in being permitted to try.

A little dory was lying on the beach, and I asked the sentinel who was parading up and down if he objected to my taking a little pull to stretch my arms. He did not object, but he thought I would soon get my fill of it.

I carried an umbrella, as it had been showery, and with this I got into the boat. Then I pulled up and down a few times in the rough water, edging out farther with each tack, until finally, when I thought it the proper moment, I squared away, hoisted my umbrella as a sail, and with an oar for a rudder bade Fort Warren good-bye.

The only question was whether I could pull faster than the umbrella would propel me. I concluded to stick to the umbrella, for the wind was very strong out there and I was making good headway.

The little dory fairly skimmed the waves, and more than half the time there were great billows between me and the shore. I made the passage across, folded my faithful umbrella, left the dory at the navy yard, and took the first train for New York.

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The White Star Line now offered me a position at what was considered the very excellent salary of several thousand dollars a year, and I remained with that company until 1871, when I had another attack of the journalistic fever — one never is permanently cured of that complaint — and in July of the same year, on a capital of four hundred dollars, I established the Nautical Gazette, an eight-page weekly paper, the first maritime journal of America.

In two years the Nautical Gazette had a paid circulation of seven thousand regular subscribers and had become a sixteen page paper. Furthermore, I had been elected secretary of the National Board of Steam Navigation, a position

which required my presence in Washington during the sessions of Congress, where I represented both the board and my paper, and was associated intimately with almost everyone of importance in political life.

For thirteen years uninterruptedly I owned and edited the Nautical Gazette; then, one autumn, on the way from Washington I was in a train that broke in two, and I received injuries which made it necessary for me to give up all work and go abroad. I did not sell out, but closed up the paper, paying all subscribers and advertisers, resuming publication several months later, fully restored to health.

The Nautical Gazette had various fortunes and owners after my retirement, and still exists, a flourishing publication owned by Crossett & Bates.

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I had made a preliminary contract with the asphalt interests of Venezuela. Hoping to build the transportation line, I returned to England, but could effect no satisfactory arrangement.

The asphalt people now made me a proposition to go to Guanoco and superintend their plant at that point, also the La Brea & Guanoco Railway. I accepted, and sailed from New York on the steamer Fontdbelle for my new destination. A number of years had slipped away in various steamship projects and in other more or less successful undertakings, and it was January nth, 1896, when I left for the now notorious asphalt districts of the south.

My experience as superintendent of the New York & Bermudez Company and of the La Brea & Guanoco Railway was neither very long nor very agreeable. All the petty intrigue and underground politics which have since come to the surface, as it were, of the lakes of pitch were then fermenting, and I did not fancy the process.

The asphalt lakes, however, constitute one of the wonders of the world. The largest, La Brea, is about five miles long and three miles wide, and the major portion of it consists of asphalt in its pure state.

This substance is a bituminous vegetable product, like coal, distilled and diffused by some subterranean volcanic agency, and in its liquid state it bubbles and blisters under the fierce tropic sun — literally a lake of pitch. In places, where it is cooled and hardened, it is covered with tropical vegetation, which has to be cut away before the asphalt can be removed.



The supply seems inexhaustible, and no matter how much is taken out, within a short time the hole fills and the level of the lake is restored. Whether the supply is really never-ending, time alone can tell.

Perhaps I should say a few words here as to the method of handling this strange merchandise. The workmen employed during my administration ranged in number from one hundred to three hundred West India negroes and native Venezuelans, about equally divided.

Vessels were chartered and sent to Guanoco to bring coal for the locomotives, piles for wharfage and various supplies — the vessels to be returned with cargoes of asphalt ranging in bulk from five hundred to eight hundred tons.

Cars which brought the asphalt from the lakes held about one ton each, and to prevent the pitch from sticking to the sides they were washed with a coat of mud. The bodies of the cars were hoisted from the trucks and the contents dumped into the ship's hold, in bulk.

Great care had to be exercised in confining the asphalt, for if it shifted it was likely to put a vessel on her beam ends. It was a peculiar business, throughout, and I was not unhappy, when, at the end of September, 1896, my connection with it ceased.

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### **A Mysterious White Race**

I was glad, however, of my Guanoco experience, which certainly was a new one to me, and I was interested in acquainting myself with the aborigines of this portion of the globe.

These are of two distinct kinds — the first being a few tribes of the ordinary Venezuela Indians, who live in swamps and sleep in hammocks made fast to trees, with no other covering than a few palm leaves, during the rainy season — the other race being the strange White Indians of Venezuela, of whom so little has been written or is known, even by natives of the country.

As it became my fortune to meet and to see something of a number of these wonderful people, it seems worth while to make more than a passing mention of them here.

From my arrival in Venezuela I had heard marvellous tales concerning them, how they dwelt in a fertile valley, surrounded by lofty mountains —

living at peace with the world, because they refused to mingle with the people of the world or to allow anyone not of their own race to enter their domain.

They were said to be by no means a [violent] people — quite the contrary, in fact — but strong to resist invasion, nature having aided them in maintaining their seclusion.

Passing up the San Juan River, the casual observer would never notice the mouth of a small navigable creek concealed by overhanging tropic foliage. Yet this is their gateway, and a little way above, a guard — all that is needed for the narrow place — permits none but the strange white natives to pass.

What lies beyond, in that fabulous valley of seclusion, none but themselves have ever seen. Yet such are the reports of marvels there, that more than one man has risked his life in attempting to enter this forbidden land.

It is said that war, famine, and pestilence are unknown within its borders; that stores of priceless jewels are there, such as the world has never known; that all of their domestic utensils are fashioned of beaten gold.

I don't see how men have ever learned these things, when nobody has ever been there, and when the people themselves will have nothing to say of their affairs.

At all events, these are the reports. What we know is, that they weave the most marvellous hammocks in the world — hammocks of a net and filament so fine, yet so strong and expansive, that one may wrap it around and around the body in a countless envelopment of folds until one is sheathed and enshrouded in a perfect cocoon.

They have very little outside traffic beyond this hammock industry — the latter, when I was there, being carried on through the comandante del Rio, General Brito, who had won a measure of their confidence. To General Brito they turned over their hammocks which [were] sold in Trinidad.

During my residence in Venezuela I saw two parties of these strange people, each party consisting of seven persons in charge of General Brito. We were building some small huts (ranches) for the workmen, and needed a quantity of temeche palm for thatching.

We finally contracted with General Brito to build a number of these huts and thatch them, complete. When the frames were ready, he left and went up the river, returning a few days later with a very large curiara or canoe (fashioned from a great single log), loaded like a hay boat with the temeche, and manned by seven unusual-looking white men.

There were several hundred employees at our works, yet none of them had ever seen such men as these before. Curiosity ran high, for they wore what resembled European clothing, and we all knew there were no white strangers in our neighbourhood. Besides, no white men of our race were ever so adept at using a paddle as these.

When the canoe grounded and General Brito came ashore, I said to him:

"Who and what are those men?"

"Those," said General Brito, "are some of the famous White Indians of Venezuela. I have contracted with them for the temeche, and persuaded them to bring it here. I thought you might like to see a few specimens of this race."

I watched them intently while they unloaded their craft, which they did in a brisk, busy way, saying not a single word during the operation. Then by Brito's invitation they pulled their canoe up high and dry on the shore and gathered around him.

I had an excellent opportunity to study their physical characteristics, and I think I was never so impressed by any human beings. In the first place they were absolutely different from any people I had ever seen. They were white, it is true, but it was not the white of the Caucasian.

It was a strange, indescribable white that would attract attention anywhere, and, though so unusual, did not repel. In their cheeks there was a pinkish hue, but their skin showed no tan or burn, such as one is led to expect in that fierce climate, where the thermometer ranges at from 122° to 130° at midday.

Their features were well formed and regular. They had moderately high foreheads; full, round, but keen, eyes; well formed noses; mouths indicating firmness; beautiful ears; well rounded chins. Their hair was coal-black, but not coarse.

In figure they were graceful and of medium height, with a weight of perhaps one hundred and forty-five pounds. They stood erect and were apparently of great strength. Their hands and feet were well formed and seemed small.

Their clothing, as I have said, was European. It had been purchased in Port of Spain, evidently, and the wearers seemed quite at home in it, though it was General Brito's belief that such attire was never worn inside their own domain. It was put on for contact with the outside world, and then only by a few.

Such native dress as he had seen was very simple, and was not unlike that worn by the darker tribes. What was the female attire, he could not guess, as

never in all his forty years' experience in that district had he seen a woman of this white race, nor a female child. He knew little of their language, and absolutely nothing of their manners and customs.

You may imagine how intently I studied the little group, while these curious people in turn showed a certain mild interest in us and our surroundings. We tried to get them to ride up to the superintendent's house on the train, but they preferred to walk rather than trust themselves behind a locomotive.

They entered the building, however, and were taken through the various departments, the office, the kitchen, and the store, all of which seemed to give them a quiet pleasure. In the store we treated them to some refreshments.

Then we showed them the carpenter shops; also the wharf, where vessels were being loaded. They went aboard one of the vessels and walked about the decks, gazed up at the lofty spars and down into the hatchways, but they could not be persuaded to go into the hold or the cabin. After two or three hours with us they pushed their curiara off the river bank, and seizing their paddles were soon out of sight around a bend of the river, homeward bound.

About a week later General Brito brought down another load of temeche palm with another, and entirely different, crew of the strange people. They behaved precisely like their predecessors, and in a brief space disappeared into their mysterious seclusion and we saw them no more.

General Brito said that he had never seen any sign of gold or treasure among them, and he thought the stories told were largely mythical.

It was possible, he thought, that they might have certain jewels and articles of gold and silver, used for ornament or religious service, but he believed it unlikely that domestic implements would be fashioned of any precious metal, for they knew its value and would use their surplus to supply their needs.

I sincerely hope that through ages to come they may maintain the peace and seclusion of their happy valley.

I remained for a considerable time in South America after severing my connection with the Bermudez company, engaged in various undertakings. Eventually I went to Caracas, thence to Carupano, where I remained several months, making a survey of a railroad route to the vast sulphur deposits there, also of the deposits themselves and of the harbour of Carupano — a chart of which was published by the United States Hydrographic Office at Washington, and for which the Government of Venezuela very kindly decorated me with the order of the Bust of the Liberator.

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And so we have reached the end of our long way. And a long way it is, for it began far back in another century, while just a little beyond the horizon is the signal buoy that will tally four score years. I voyage now in quiet and familiar waters. The compass no longer points to unknown harbours, over uncharted seas.

Like any other craft of a vanished time, I have been retired from the action of the front, trying to be content with the memories of the vanished days. Perhaps the old craft may be good for another voyage yet — something with just enough of the flavour of adventure to set one's pulse going and make him forget the years.

[The End of book selections.]