



BOOKS AT BROWN

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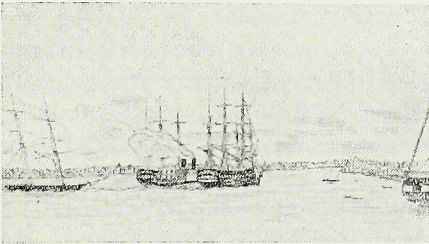
SEPTEMBER, 1945

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A DOWN-EASTER ABOARD SHIP, 1844-1847

TO MR. JAMES H. ARTHUR, '97, a FRIEND of the Library, we are indebted for the deposit of four century-old manuscripts, comprising a navigation work-book, a navigation "Field Book," and two decidedly interesting volumes containing four log-books. These manuscripts appear to be entirely the work of S. Gleason Stevens of Eastport, Maine, who emerges from them an even-tempered, levelheaded, seafaring young man reared in a staunch Christian home, possessed of an inquiring mind, a quiet sense of humor, and endowed with definite artistic talent. Mr. Stevens could draw well; the charm of his sketches of ships and ports of call compel a closer inspection of the log-books, where he exercised this talent, and where also he demonstrated facility in writing descriptive prose.

The first journal commences five days before Christmas, 1844, when the brig "Imogene" of Bangor, Maine, under command of Daniel Shed, Jr., sailed from Philadelphia down the Delaware, midst floating ice, bound for Barbados. The voyage, of twenty days duration, was not especially eventful. There was a blow or two, porpoises and flying fish made sport on the surface, a wrecked schooner was sighted "Foremast & main topmast gone. Saw no one on board," and for several evenings prior to January 8th a "small comet in the SW altitude about 40 degrees" was observed.



SCENE ON THE MISSISSIPPI

On January 9th the ship anchored off the coral reefs of Bridgetown to disgorge its cargo of crackers, meal and snuff. As for the harbor the log records "a small fort at the entrance . . . The town looks very prettily the houses half buried in trees of orange &c here & there a lofty cocoa nut

tree . . . The trade winds blow here the year round from the east . . . The climate is delightful . . . On the public wharf it is a complete Bedlam men women & children all in a mixed medley on hand for a bargain quarrel or fun laughing singing & quarrelling . . .”

On January 15th the ship cleared for New Orleans, sailed through a smooth Caribbean sea past Martinique, along the Dominican shore “very high, the mountain tops covered with clouds,” and on past Guadeloupe, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica. On January 25th a school of dolphins was sighted — “the Mate threw the harpoon several times but caught none — hit one but didn’t stick.” Four days later the ship crossed the Tropic of Cancer in the Gulf of Mexico. On the following day “Those 24 hours rough & tumble has been the game — 2 P M came on to blow with a heavy sea from the northward & rain . . . Pitching into the sea the worst kind. At supper each one took a corner & eat the best way he could.”

The period February 3rd to February 14th was spent ascending the Mississippi, much of the time, it appears, either against the wind or without benefit of any wind, in company with other vessels, four of them in tow of the steamer “Panther.” “It was a grand sight. We could see her machinery on deck looking like a smothered fire & a stream of sparks from her chimnies. She moved steadily about 3 miles pr hour & growling & snorting at a great rate.” The route carried the ship past red cedar and oak trees, the latter “covered with long grey moss & grape vines are twisted over all the trees like great serpents. Between the trees grow the beautiful Palmetto about eight feet high.”

A sugar plantation took shape as “a large handsome house for the owner, a large sugar house where they press the cane & boil the juice, & some 20 or 30 small houses in a row for the negroes . . . ploughing, hoeing . . . For ploughing they use oxen & asses. We kept along about 4 miles per hour occasionally talking with the negroes . . . The negro told us that ‘Massa White’ raised 900 hlds of sugar this year it being a very good season . . .”

On February 11th the steeples and shipping of New Orleans came in sight. Three days later the “Imogene” came to anchor off Algiers, opposite New Orleans. Stevens spent the time from then until early March taking in the sights. To one accustomed to comparatively strict observance of the Sabbath the French markets on Sunday brought at least mild surprise. “. . . such confusion of tongues as there was. It looked very little like Sunday . . . took a stroll down the levee. Saw a good many stores open same as week days & drayman (*sic*) at work . . .” One day at Oak Plains twenty-five hundred troops engaged in a “sham fight . . . It was conducted very well but wanted animation.” On a Sunday evening

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announce a program for the

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the Presbyterian clergyman in Lafayette Square delivered a sermon in which we are told he "reprimanded the practice of carrying concealed weapons duelling . . ."

On the day of departure Stevens recorded more impressions of the Crescent City. "Here are representatives from almost every nation on earth — English Irish Scotch slow moving Dutch the swarthy Spaniard with mustachioed lip the still swarthier Chinese with long black hair the Frenchman with his oui oui the Yankee going as he was sent for and going as fast as possible the Hoosier with homespun suit. th (*sic*) blanketed Indian Italian Swedes . . . throng the streets. Temperance is at a low ebb."

The return trip down the river, and through the southwest pass was made in three days. Eight days later the ship stood some twenty miles off Havana "Jammed close in the wind not wishing a nearer acquaintance with Cuba while the wind was from the north." Thence the route turned north through days of rougher wind and water, through the "Gulf Stream where Eolus and Neptune meet to have sport & fine sport they make too . . . the Brig flounders and stumbles into the sea throwing the spray all over herself but makes slow progress. The heavier the sea the more fun is the rule on board so all hands of us from the Captain down are full of mischief & jollity."

The "Imogene" anchored in New York's East River March 28th. Thirteen days later the captain sold her for three thousand dollars. He and the crew, except Stevens, arranged to go to Bangor in the bark "Cuba." Stevens decided to go to Philadelphia for a visit. Upon taking leave of the captain Stevens wrote "I esteemed him highly . . . And the crew: it is seldom a better crew assemble on a vessels deck . . . And lastly the Brig to use the Capts. words 'She was a beautiful creature. She would work like a top, go through the water like a shark & in a heavy sea would handle herself like a dancing master and lay to like a duck.'"

After an excursion to Philadelphia, a separate journal of which is recorded in seven pages in the manuscript, Stevens left that city May 7th in the brig "Felica" bound for Boston and Eastport. This brief voyage is recorded in the second log. The ship put in at Boston May 12th and reached Eastport May 20th. "Thus ends my voyage having been from home seven months exactly."

The third log takes us in the following year, 1846, from New Orleans to Havre, thence to New York. A separate journal of a side trip to Paris is present, and is of considerable interest for first-hand impressions of the French capital a century ago. Beginning this third voyage, the ship "Metoka," of New York, John N. McLarren, master, was towed across the bar, southwest pass of the Mississippi, by the steamer "Hercules"

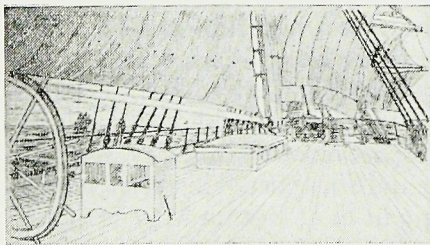
after leaving New Orleans on the preceding day with a cargo of cotton. The voyage carried past Cuba, then north and east across the Atlantic through all kinds of weather, "pleasant winds . . . moderate winds . . . unpleasant & squally . . . blowing hard . . . The ship then under close reefed topsail forsail & staysail & flying through the water like mad. The spray flying in clouds around her. Two men at the wheel & no chance for them to nod either."

The ship entered the English Channel forty-six days out from New Orleans, and arrived at Havre two days later, April 8th. "Custom house officers came on board & overhauled everything from top to bottom for 'la Tabac' . . . Havre is all commotion now being crowded with emigrants from Switzerland and Germany."

On April 22nd the "Metoka" was substituted for another in "the packet line" and chartered for New York for twenty-five thousand francs, to take 310 steerage passengers. The ship sailed April 27th and arrived in New York June 1st, 1846. "Thus ends the voyage & we are again in New York after an absence of Seven Months." This final entry means evidently that there was an earlier log, not now present, covering a period of some three and one-half months prior to February 20th, 1846, when the ship departed from New Orleans.

The final log records a "voyage from New York to Liverpool and back to New York touching at Cork in distress, in the ship Metoka of New York John N. McLaren Master."

The ship left an East River pier on July 6th, 1846, carrying 40 passengers and cargo consisting of "4062 Bbls flour 520 Tierces Beef — 692 bales Cotton 213 Shooks & Hoops — 13000 Bus grain — 24 Iron ca-booses 745 Bags wheat—& some boxes & casks Bones &c &c." Twenty-six days later she docked at Liverpool after a trip in weather for the most part warm and pleasant.



DECK SCENE ON THE "METOKA"

On September 11th with 310 steerage and 12 cabin passengers on board the "Metoka" began the return trip to New York, a voyage in decided contrast with

those already sketched. Before reaching the East River again three passengers died, two sailors fell from the foremast into the sea, one of them drowning, the crew twice took offence at their food, refusing to work, passengers broke into water casks and wasted the water, crew members became intoxicated from whiskey which they stole from the passengers,

and the ship underwent a beating from wind and sea off Ireland forceful enough to send her to Cork for repairs before proceeding further across the Atlantic.

On September 21st after several days of wind and rain "A tremendous sea struck the weather Bow & carried away the bowsprit cutwater & stern to the waters edge. The fore topmast head of foremast & for yard followed the Bowsprit & the Main topgallant mast & head of main topmast followed that. The same sea broke upon deck staving the monkey rail & carried away the galley house off the long boat & water casks spare spars & every thing moveable on deck. The cook who was in the galley was badly injured & also several seamen by the casks &c drifting about the deck. The wreck was cut away with axes . . . then all hands mustered to the pumps . . . These 24 hours blowing a perfect gale of wind from NW. The ship lying to under close reefed main topsail. The sea running very high . . . saw a schooner bound east. Set our union jack at the head of mizzen topmast as a sign of distress . . . rolling fearfully in the trough of the sea . . . The first part of these 24 hours light wind from W . . . heavy swell. All sail set that was possible. Getting out ballast setting up rigging & preparing spare spars for use . . . these 24 hours blowing a perfect gale . . . the sea running very high . . . Blowing harder than ever. The main yard was sprung at this time & all were anxious lest the main topsail should blow away . . . a sea struck the bow & an alarm was raised forward that a plank had started & the ship was filling with water. But 'twas a false alarm . . . more moderate but still blowing . . . all sail set that was possible . . . Saw a brig bound east in a crippled state."

On October 2nd the ship passed the light at the entrance of Cork and was taken in tow by a steamer. Later the "American consul came on board . . . The government Surveyers ordered the ship into dock for examination."

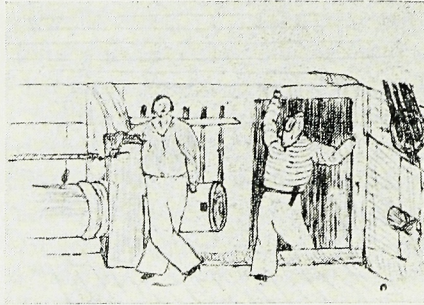
Extensive repairs were necessary, and it was not until December 3rd that the voyage was resumed. The ship weathered more rough weather easily, and came to anchor "above 'White Hall'" January 7th, 1847. On the next day the "Metoka" was towed to her East River pier. "The crew hardly stopping to make the ship fast tumbled ashore—Passengers all went ashore & for the first time for four months there was quiet in the Ship. After an absence of Six Months we are again in 'New York.'" Thus ends the last of the four logs.

Some one hundred and twenty-five drawings lend charm and color to the log-books. Many illustrate the ship's progress through the sea, heightening the salty flavor of the written text. Others, somewhat wider in scope, are particularly effective. Of the three reproduced here the

first represents, as its caption indicates, a scene on the Mississippi, drawn presumably on February 12th, 1846. The second represents the deck of the "Metoka." The third speaks adequately for itself.

Edward G. Freehafer, '30

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"JACK ON SUNDAY"

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