

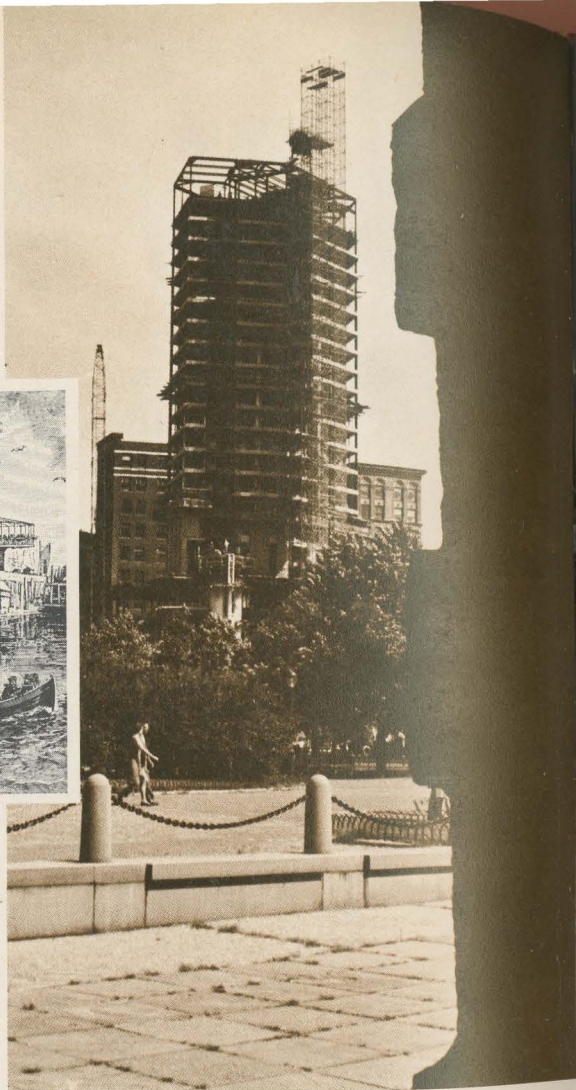
# the LOOKOUT

SEAMEN'S CHURCH INSTITUTE OF NEW YORK



OCTOBER 1967

New SCI building as seen from main entrance of the ruins of Fort Clinton (inset) in Battery Park. Brick-work on SCI structure is drawing toward completion.



## the LOOKOUT

Vol. 58, No. 8

October 1967

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SEAMEN'S CHURCH  
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Published monthly with exception of July-August and February-March when bi-monthly. Contributions to the Seamen's Church Institute of New York of \$5.00 or more include a year's subscription to *The Lookout*. Single subscriptions are \$2.00 annually. Single copies 50¢. Additional postage for Canada, Latin America, Spain, \$1.00; other foreign, \$3.00. Second class postage paid at New York, N. Y.

COVER: Illustration by Paul Gustave Doré, French artist (1832-1883), for Coleridge's allegorical poem, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Doré here depicts vengeful apparitions punishing Mariner and fellow crewmen for killing the albatross.

# New England's Ghostly Pirates

by Abbie Murphy

"Piracy," it has been said, "began the very day after man attempted to transport valuable goods by sea." There is hardly a mile of the whole Atlantic Coast that has not known the tramp of a pirate's boot.

It was in the Caribbean area that the greatest "prizes" were seized, since the Spanish were forced to move their rich loot across it and into the Atlantic, where the blood-thirsty pirates lay in wait.

The New England coast, with its rugged outline, its innumerable small, isolated islands, its sheltered coves and harbors, offered a particularly appealing rendezvous for the freebooters.

In the quiet streets of Marblehead, Massachusetts, the roistering Captain John Quelch, better known as "Old Quelch," was arrested and brought back to Boston for trial. He was executed there in 1704.

The wealthy Massachusetts merchants from Boston and Salem heartily resented the activities of "the brethren of the sea." The threat of the marauders made it necessary for their ships to carry cannon, shot, and powder, and

greatly reduced the profits made on their cargoes. To New England the pirates came, however, for their own good reasons.

It is to be expected, then, that pirates' ghosts would often be seen and heard on New England's shores, on its sequestered islands, and in its rocky woodlands.

The Isles of Shoals in New Hampshire, a group of several islands, are the scene of many a pirate legend. One of the better known stories concerns "The Watcher of White Island." "The Watcher" is one of the lovelier guardians of "pyrate gold." The villain whose loot is still so zealously guarded was the mighty and ferocious Blackbeard himself.

The terrifying Blackbeard, on one of his journeys, brought to the Isles a beautiful woman. There was much carousing on White Island, and much burying of gold, silver, and precious gems. When a hostile vessel appeared offshore, Blackbeard sailed out to do battle. He never returned, but his light o' love was left to watch over his loot. The woman has been seen many times,

people say, "a shapely figure wrapped in a long sea cloak; her golden hair blowing in the wind."

On another of this group, Appledore Island, is a very different kind of spirit, so legend tells us. This one is "Old Nab," one of Captain Kidd's crewmen, who was killed so that his ghost might be forever watchful of loot secreted there. "Pale and dreadful to behold" is Old Nab, "with the mark of the hangman's noose on his neck."

In Ipswich, Massachusetts, Harry Main, though not a true pirate, is said to haunt the shore. Harry lured vessels to their doom by means of false lights, and then without risk to himself, robbed them of their cargoes.

His ghost is compelled to twine ropes of sand on Ipswich Bar, where he sent many ships ashore. Some say he must also shovel back the incoming tide. When the sand rope breaks, Harry's roars of rage can be heard for miles. "Listen," say those who hear him, "old Harry's grumbling again!"

The "Screeching Woman" of Marblehead is a pathetic ghost. She was an English girl captured by pirates and killed in Oakum Bay, near what is now Front Street. Her screams for mercy have caused many a brave "Header" to tremble.

On Deer Island in Boston Harbor "the ghost without a head" is an awesome apparition. In 1819 one Frederick Brown, the wandering poet of Boston Bay, had this to say about Deer Island's ghost.



*"Here, superstition often tells  
Of a ghost that's heard to screech,  
And utter dismal piercing yells  
At midnight on the beach.  
Oft I've heard the story told  
How a ghost without a head  
Here guards some thousand pounds  
in gold  
By some strange fancy led."*

Evidently many ghosts feel that guarding treasure is no "strange fancy."

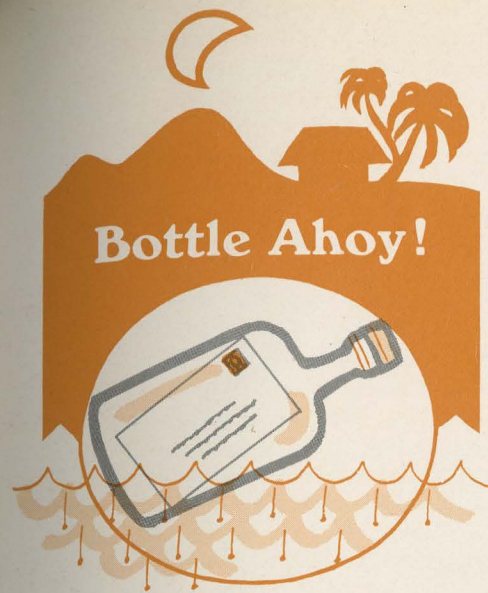
Thomas Veale, a pirate who hid his loot in a cave in Dungeon Rock in the Lynn, Massachusetts, woods, was extremely unlucky. He stayed right with his precious hoard, living in the cave for over a year. An avalanche, caused by a hurricane, closed the opening of the cave, and Veale was walled up there. His ghost, however, apparently slipped out to bewail his misfortune, as there have been many reports of his appearance.

More buried treasure has been found along the rockbound coast of Maine than anywhere else in New England. However, there are few piratical spectres there, or little is heard from them, anyway.

Captain Kidd was known to have prowled Connecticut waters, and Blackbeard, as well. In Old Lyme, Connecticut, there's a storied monster who leaps suddenly upon any intruders seeking the gold buried there by "the brethren" centuries ago.

Any area like New England which was so frequently visited by pirate luminaries like Blackbeard, Kidd, "Long John" Avery, Samuel Ballamy, "Black Walt" and other "head men" of the pirate world could hardly expect to evade their ghostly presence throughout the centuries.

At least, New England legend credits them with being very much around, even yet. And most of us do not seek an encounter with characters like these, in spirit or in the flesh, simply to prove or disprove the hair-raising stories.



## Bottle Ahoy!

by Edyth Harper

The sea is endlessly casting up unwanted objects on the shores of the world. Wood, tins, plastic containers, old shoes, litter in fact from every nation. Not least of the things that lie on the tide line is a collection of bottles. And every now and then a bottle full of Romance is found.

Not much Romance you may say about an unwanted bottle, but for centuries men have thrown bottles into the sea with a message inside them. Who first tried out this maritime message service is unknown but it is on record that as long ago as Queen Elizabeth I's reign in Britain there was an official known as the "Uncorker of Bottles."

History says a fisherman on Dover beach found a bottle with a message in it. Not able to read, he took it to his betters who were astonished to find it was a letter to the Queen from a secret agent, reporting that Novaya Zemlya island had been seized by the Dutch.

Not unnaturally, Her Majesty, who had a pretty temper, flew into a Royal rage. No woman likes to have others

read her letters. She appointed an official bottle-opener and threatened death to anyone who dared to find out for themselves what messages were inside bottles. It was not until George III's reign (1760-1820) that the position was abolished.

Columbus after discovering America in 1492, nearly became a bottle throwing addict. In his anxiety to tell the world of his discovery, he trusted the news to a wooden cask which was never found.

In 1906, the General Post Office of Britain offered 2/6 to the finder of any bottle set afloat off St. Kilda. For some years a few coins were duly paid but recently no more of these bottles have appeared.

As a means of spreading the news, bottle-launching is a tricky business. George Phillips of Washington has sent out, with help from friends, over 15,000 wine, spirit and beer bottles over the years with texts inside them in many languages.

More than 1,400 people have acknowledged receipt from 40 different countries. A Mr. Jewell Pierce of Alabama over 25 years set some 30,000 bottles adrift with 6,000 answers to his credit. It took 13 years for one bottle to be found.

Benjamin Franklin used bottles to prove theories about the Gulf Stream. He duly recorded any answers received — most of which have been proved accurate. Later the U.S. Navy used the same method to record the track of ocean currents. The work was carried out by the Bureau in Charge of Floating Bottles.

The Scottish Fishery Board went into the bottle business in earnest in 1894 and the work still goes on. Dr. Tait of Aberdeen said the longest recorded voyage of a bottle was one of many put in the sea by Dr. Bruce of the Scottish Antarctic Expedition (1902-4). Four years later, two turned up in Victoria, Australia; one reached New Zealand, a journey of around

(Continued on page 9)

# JINX AT SEA

by James M. Powles

Early on the morning of October 16, 1829, the schooner *Mermaid* sailed out of Sydney harbor bound for Collier Bay on the west side of Australia. Her crew of nineteen men and three passengers were on deck that bright, sunny day watching Sydney fade into the distance. Looking forward to a pleasant passage, little did they realize that the *Mermaid* was sailing them into one of the most unusual stories of shipwreck to unfold from the sea.

The *Mermaid* sailed along swiftly

for the first three days. On the evening of the fourth day she was working through the dangerous waters of the Straits of Torres when a gale blew up. Her skipper, Captain Samuel Nalbrow, tried desperately to keep his ship on course but the rough seas kept pounding the small schooner toward the treacherous rocks that lined the narrow channel separating Australia and New Guinea.

Despite the tremendous effort of her crew, it wasn't long before all aboard knew that they were in a hopeless position; only a miracle could save them. But a miracle was not yet to come. For the schooner was hit by a huge wave and tossed like a piece of driftwood onto a nearby reef. Within five minutes the *Mermaid's* company were fighting for their lives in the raging waters.

When morning came, twenty-two men were sitting on a rocky ledge several hundred feet from the broken hull of the *Mermaid*. Not a soul was lost; the miracle had come.

The cold and tired men waited silently on the barren ledge hoping to be rescued by a passing vessel before nature took its toll. They had to wait three days before their prayers for rescue were answered by the bark *Swiftsure*. As soon as the lookout spotted the *Mermaid's* crew and passengers, the bark hove to and took them aboard.

Five days later the *Swiftsure* was sailing off the coast of New Guinea when she was caught by one of the strong tidal currents common in that area. The current grabbed the bark in her vise-like grip and pushed her broadside onto the rock-bound shore. Before the bark could break up, the crews made it to the safety of the beach.

Captain Nalbrow and the *Swiftsure's* master were making plans later that day for survival when they were spotted by a passing schooner, the *Governor Ready*. Although the schooner carried thirty-two persons and a full cargo of lumber, she managed to make room for the shipwrecked group.

The *Governor Ready* had sailed on only three hours after picking up the shipwrecked men when her cargo of lumber caught fire and flames raced over the schooner. Fortunately, all three crews and passengers were able to crowd into the schooner's frail lifeboats.

Shortly after the schooner sank, the bobbing lifeboats were seen by the Australian government cutter *Comet*, which had been blown off course by a storm. After hearing Captain Nalbrow's story the cutter's crew was very anxious to put the rescued men ashore as soon as possible. For they believed there was a jinxed man among the *Mermaid's* crew.

They might have been correct be-

cause the *Comet* ran into a violent storm a week later. The storm smashed against the cutter with huge seas, sending tons of water crashing down on her decks. The ship was stripped of her sails, masts and rudder and left to the mercy of the sea.

Now positive that there was a jinxed man amongst them, the *Comet's* crew launched the only lifeboat not damaged and rowed away from the helpless hulk, leaving their passengers to fend for themselves.

After the storm had blown out, the unlucky passengers found themselves hanging onto the cutter's wreckage. For almost a day they floated in the shark-infested waters until they were rescued by the packet *Jupiter*. Aboard the *Jupiter*, Captain Nalbrow took a count and was surprised to find that all were present.

He had had four ships sunk from under his feet but in all four shipwrecks not a life was lost.

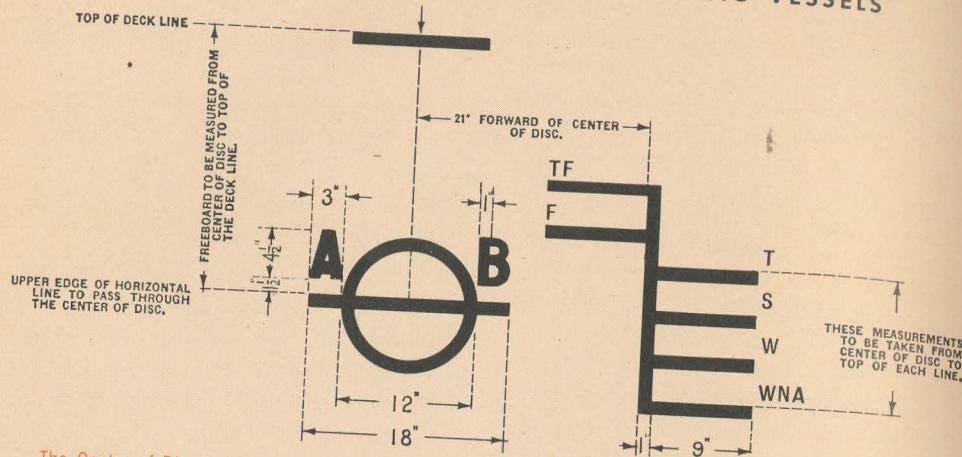
Aboard the *Jupiter* was an ill, elderly woman from Yorkshire, Sarah Richley, on her way to Australia to search for her son whom she had not seen since he had run away to sea fifteen years previously.

Mrs. Richley's son, Peter, it was discovered, was a member of the *Mermaid's* crew which the packet had rescued.



# Landlubber Sam And His Plimsoll Line

## LOAD LINE MARKINGS FOR OCEAN-GOING VESSELS



The Center of Disc to be placed on both sides of vessel at the middle of the length on the load line. The disc and lines must be permanently marked by center punch marks or chisel, and the particulars given in the Load Line Certificate are to be entered in the official log.

The markings shown are for the starboard side; on the port side the markings are to be similar, and forward of disc.

The letters **AB** signify American Bureau of Shipping.  
The letters **TF** signify Tropical Fresh Water Allowance.  
The letters **F** signify Fresh Water Allowance.

The letters **T** signify Load Line in Tropical Zones.  
The letters **S** signify Summer Load Line.  
The letters **W** signify Winter Load Line.

The letters **WNA** signify Winter North Atlantic Load Line.

by Paul Brock

On the port and starboard sides of every ship the Plimsoll Line, or Mark, shows the draught (depth) to which the vessel may be safely loaded in different circumstances and different seasons. This "Plimsoll Line" was the brainchild of a landlubber and British Member of Parliament, Samuel Plimsoll.

History records that in the 12th century the crusaders marked the sides of their ships with the Holy Cross. Venetian merchants, some Swedes and a handful of others also used various types of symbols on their ships to indicate the safe draft.

It was fairly well understood even among early mariners that the safety of a ship depended largely upon the draft (an indication of the degree of loading on the ship) and upon the free-

board or height of the ship's side out of the water (an indication of the amount of buoyancy in reserve.)

Despite efforts by Lloyd's and other shipping insurance companies there was no general marking of ships by controlled legislation. Plimsoll, shocked by the prevailing conditions, began, in 1868, a tireless campaign to have the degree of loading of ships properly regulated.

At that time there was nothing to stop shipowners from overloading. There were no inspections for seaworthiness, no examination of repairs, nor, in fact, any compulsions to make repairs. The owner could, and did, insure at twice the value of the ship and cargo, and often collected that amount when the vessel was lost at sea.

The man who tried to change all this

ran into incredible setbacks. He was hated, scorned, derided by everybody except the men who made up the ships' crews. His constituency, Derby, was far from the sea, and his enemies made much of this when Sam Plimsoll first took his seat in the House of Commons and asked for a bill to make ship owners mark their vessels with a load line.

At Plimsoll's insistence bill after bill was drafted to make a load line a legal necessity. Each and every one was defeated. "Plimsollism" became a nasty word. And Plimsoll began to show the strain. In one impassioned parliamentary address he cried out against "speculative scoundrels" and threatened to "unmask the villains who send men to their graves." For that Sam Plimsoll got thrown out of Parliament.

It was not until 1890 that Lloyd's mathematical tables, supporting Plimsoll's theory, were produced. The Plimsoll mark, a circular disc, 12 inches in diameter with a horizontal line 18 inches long drawn through its center,

became law. This line and the center of the disc marked the maximum load line.

The typical modern "Plimsoll Mark" is the result of the 1930 International Load Line convention whose recommendations were ratified by the governments of virtually every maritime nation, thus bringing to fruition Plimsoll's dream of a universal system for controlling safe drafts.

As a matter of practical convenience, governments of maritime nations delegate authority to assign freeboards to "classification societies." The letters on either side of the disc indicate the particular assigning authority: LR — Lloyd's Register; AB — American Bureau; BV — Bureau Veritas; RI — Registro Italiano; NV — Norske Veritas.

Eight years after his mark became law, Sam Plimsoll died, happy in the knowledge that his efforts to do good had gained him an affectionate nickname — "Landlubber Sam."

### BOTTLE AHOY! (Continued from page 5)

10,000 miles. Others claim the record for a bottle from a German ship between Kerguelen and Tasmania. It arrived at Bunbury. W. Australia, presumably having travelled 16,000 miles across the S. Ocean.

In 1944 a bottle was found on the beach in Maine, near wreckage. It read "Our ship is sinking. S.O.S. didn't do any good. Think it's the end. Maybe this message will get to the U.S. some day." It was proved to be from U.S.S. Beatty, torpedoed off Gibraltar in 1943.

Romance is found in bottles, however. A Swedish sailor, Ake Viking, wanted a wife. He gave his address and a description of himself to the care of a bottle. Two years later a fisherman in Sicily found it. His daughter Paolina answered the letter. After a further exchange of letters, the couple were married in 1958.

*The Institute has, from time to time, participated in or sponsored experiments in casting bottles adrift on the ocean.*

*It did so in 1950, 1957 and 1962 And possibly even further back in its history. Bottles were dropped in certain areas of the world oceans. Each one contained the name and address of a sponsor, the sponsor and finder each receiving a suitable prize if found.*

*The musical comedy star, Mary Martin, placed a message in an SCI bottle, the bottle to be dropped in the South Pacific — naturally — because Miss Martin was then starring in a show called by the same title. Miss Martin's bottle has not, apparently, ever been recovered.*

# BY THE HORN

by  
George R. Berens



At 0720, February 12, 1943, Cape Horn was abeam five points, seven miles off.

We in *Agwimonte* had come a long way to get there — off the famed rocky pinnacle that has figured for two centuries in legendary tales of the sea. We had left New York loaded deep with war material for Port Tewfik in August 1942. After landing our cargo, we were assigned to aid our British allies on a relief trip to beleaguered Malta. From there, with empty holds, we were routed to Capetown and then received orders to go to Buenos Aires and Montevideo to load.

In Montevideo, when we were almost finished loading, the captain had gone ashore to get his routing homeward. During World War II, merchant ships did not follow the established courses between ports, for this would have made it easy for the enemy to intercept them.

Instead, they were sent on evasive tracks as ordered by Allied naval authorities. Our tracks homeward were to be exceptionally evasive, we found, when the captain returned with the startling news that we were to proceed to New York via the Straits of Magellan and the Panama Canal — the long way round.

The activities of enemy submarines and surface raiders in the South Atlantic, together with the lack of naval escorts for convoying, dictated this decision. He also had an armful of charts and directories, for the waters we would steam through were entirely strange to us and our ship.

As we proceeded down the Argentine coast, the study of these charts and

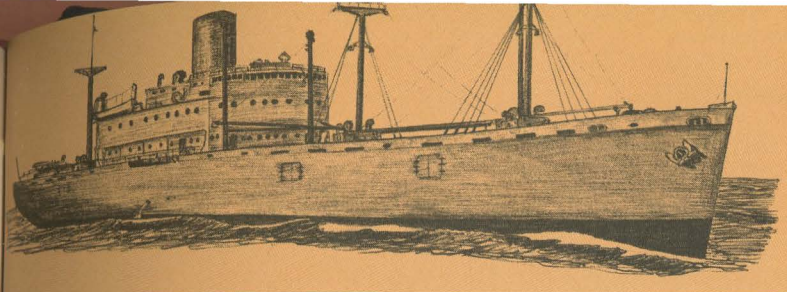
sailing directions took up a lot of our skipper's time. Every day he would spend hours in the chartroom, the charts spread out before him, the books at hand. Especially was he concerned with the navigation of the forbidding Straits — narrow waters, crooked channels, fraught with hazard, storm, fog and swift currents, swirling tide rips. The more he studied, the more perturbed he became.

Often, when I was on the bridge, he would call my attention to some of the dangers that lay ahead. It was plain to see that the captain — it was his first command — did not relish the passage through the bleak gorge between South America and the islands of Tierra del Fuego.

After listening to a few of his discourses, I conceived an idea: why not go around Cape Horn and thus avoid the perils of the Straits? The more I thought of it, the more this idea appealed to me. Many thousands of the old square-rigger men had sailed around that grim, rocky islet, and narratives of their voyages were replete with descriptions of storms and mountainous seas.

The old-timers said that no man was a real seaman until he had been around the Horn. But what ship goes there these days? Very few, if any? Here was a chance to do just that, to put ourselves in a class with the old Cape Horners.

So, we "went to work" on our captain, subtly, we hoped. Whenever he mentioned any of the hazards of navigating the Straits, we would offer comments intended to emphasize them. Often we would remark on perils, real



Sketches by the author.  
Cape Horn as seen from  
the *Agwimonte*.

or imaginary, and exaggerated dangers within his hearing. I brought to his attention the experience of that great old seaman, Joshua Slocum, as related in his book, "Sailing Alone around the World." The waters of the Straits of Magellan proved to be the most precarious in Slocum's circumnavigation and brought him closest to failure.

Our conspiracy proved successful — or possibly the captain also had ideas about going round the Horn! On the morning of the fifth day out from Montevideo, he ordered a radical alteration of course, and the word was passed that *Agwimonte* would go "by the Horn."

This quickly spread among all hands — merchant crew and navy gunners. Soon most of the conversation in quarters and mess rooms concerned the famous Cape. We would be going below 56° South, and that was further South than anyone in the ship had ever been. Speculation on what we would encounter was varied, but it was noticeable that oilskins and other heavy-weather gear were being broken out and overhauled.

The weather held good, and the morning we sighted Cape Horn was fine though rather cold, even though it was summer in these latitudes. Every man aboard hit the deck to see the famed Cape; our Deck Cadet was on the flying bridge, sketching the storm-scarred headland.

As the Cape was passed abeam, the captain ordered a change of course to bring us well clear of Diego Ramirez rocks, and remarked:

"I'll never believe those stories about Cape Horn anymore." For the weather

resembled an early spring day at home — no Cape Horn snorters, no Southern Ocean graybeards.

But in the hazy distance behind the grim rocky pinnacles old Father Neptune must have been smiling as he thought:

"Just wait, you modern mariners, you'll find out before long all about the Cape Horn road."

For, a few hours after our serene passing of the fabled Cape, the wind from westward started to pick up. Hour by hour it increased, and the sea began to toss *Agwimonte* about. Twelve hours after passing the Horn we were hove-to in a force ten gale with the famed greybeards roaring at us. Many of them broke crashing over the bows and flooded the decks. Mist and flying spume cut visibility to a quarter mile, and the ship staggered in the onslaught of the foaming seas. Engine speed was reduced to the minimum that would give steerage way.

We were hove-to for forty-eight hours before the storm winds tapered off and the seas subsided so we could make headway on our course. But we were all well-satisfied.

We had come "by Cape Horn," and that surely must be a rare experience in these days of powered ships and the Panama Canal.

There were, I understand, several merchant ships routed on the Cape Horn road during World War II. Some of the seamen who visit the Institute have, no doubt, sighted the fabled Cape as we in *Agwimonte* did. But I don't suppose any of us will see it again. Still, all will cherish the memory.

## SEA ROVER

Sailor, sir, of rakish cap  
trousers billowing in the breeze

Sunburned face and roughened hand  
morning watch and evening tea

sailor, sir, of rakish cap,  
does the sunset melt the sea?

Sailor, sir, of palm tree beach  
cool lagoon and coral reef

striped shell and blue tattoo  
bitter rum and monsoon whirl

sailor, sir, of palm tree beach  
does the dinghy speak of dreams?

Sailor, sir, of infinite eye  
weary arm and silent smile

chanty voice low and high  
starstruck dawn and moonlit night

sailor, sir, of infinite eye,  
does the seagull laugh and cry?

Sailor, sir, of harbor port  
tree-lined street and pigeon park

brownstone house and graying pup  
evening paper, pillowed cot

sailor, sir, of harbor port,  
do the islands have your heart?

J. A. Murray

