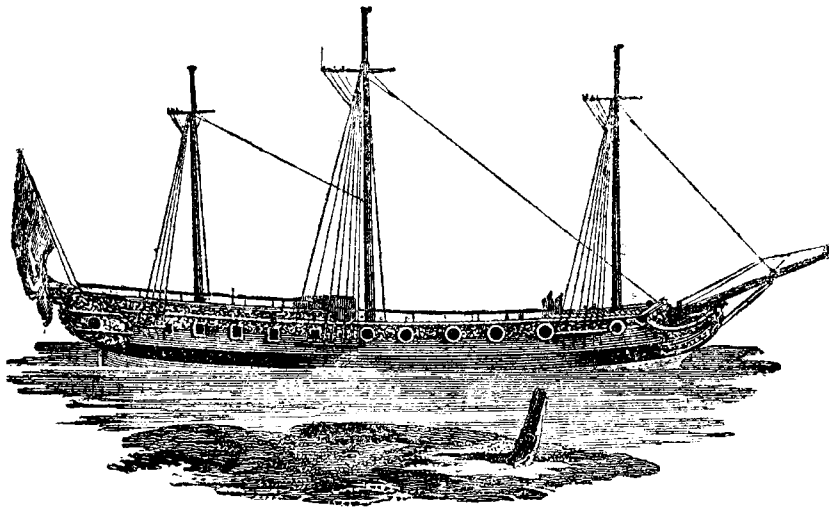


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Excerpt

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The Royal Sovereign Yacht, built at Deptford, and launched there during the summer of 1804. After which she attended on the King at Weymouth, commanded by Sir Harry Burrard Neale. This Yacht is of larger dimensions than any that had been previously built; and is a remarkably good Sea Boat.

BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIR OF
LIEUTENANT WILLIAM HUNTER*,

OF GREENWICH HOSPITAL:

An intimate Friend of the Poet FALCONER.

“THE WEDDING GUEST SAT ON A STONE,
HE CANNOT CHUSE BUT HEAR;
AND THUS SPAKE ON THAT ANCYENT MAN
THE BRIGHT-EY'D MARINERE:
LISTEN STRANGER!”

(*Line of the Ancyent Marinere* †.)

The following simple Narrative contains the life of a Veteran who, though not altogether successful in his Naval Career, yet has uniformly *run with Patience the race that was set before him*. It was originally drawn up to gratify the curiosity of a Friend; and it is alone owing to the importunity of friendship, that so correct a delineation of a British Seaman is now presented to

* Brother to Captain Hunter, late Governor of New Holland.

† See NAVAL CHRONICLE, Vol. II, p. 328.

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the public. May it prove a powerful antidote to the discontent which frequently increases their natural irritability, and overcome that despondency which has sometimes induced Officers to tax their country with ingratitude.

I WAS born in the City of Edinburgh on the 6th of May, O. S., 1731, and having from my cradle an abhorrence of a sedentary life, I went to sea at the early age of twelve years with my Father, in the *Britannia* Merchantman fitted out from Leith belonging to the London Trade. After making several voyages both in her and in the Ships *James* and *John*, the latter was taken up as a Transport, and ordered with many others to proceed to Aberdeen, under convoy of his Majesty's Ship *Fox*, of 20 guns, commanded by Capt. Beaver; who was under orders there to embark some Troops that were destined to oppose the progress of the Rebels, already in the vicinity of Edinburgh. Having received the Troops and thirty-two Horse on board, we landed them at Dunbar, and then proceeded for Leith; when a violent Gale came on about N.W. and obliged us to anchor under Iuch Keith Island*, nearly opposite to Leith. The *Fox* was lost during the night on the Sands of north Berwick, and every soul perished. We arrived providentially at Leith; when, wishing for a little relaxation on shore, I quitted the *John*, and remained a short time with my Father.

About this time the battle of Preston was fought, and the town swarmed with Rebels. I remained at home until after the battle of Falkirk, when I again grew weary of a quiet life, and longed to be at Sea. It happened that my Uncle, who was Purser of the *Lizard* Sloop, then on the Bristol Station, wrote to my Father and requested I might be sent; as the Captain had promised to rate me Mid: they accordingly equipped me in all haste, and I embarked with no small degree of exultation on board a Ship that was bound for London. If not the most prosperous, it was at least one of the happiest Cruises in my

* It is half a league long, and half a mile broad, and has an Harbour towards each quarter: round its coasts are shoals of fish, and abundance of oysters.

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life. I had a letter in my chest from my Father to a fair-weather Friend of his in town, who was requested to advance me a small sum to defray my expenses to Bristol: though disappointed in this supply, I was resolved not to knock under; so, having no other alternative, I forthwith shipped myself, in the year 1746, on board the Neptune Letter of Marque, then lying off Irongate Stairs, bound for the Mediterranean, commanded by Capt. Charles Betson, with a complement of forty-five men, at thirty-five shillings a month. Having completed our Cargo, we sailed through the Downs with a fair wind; off Beachy, or as Seamen call it, the Seven Cliffs, it took us a-head: kept plying to windward; but during the night in standing to the northward we struck on the Owers, a bank at S.E., half S. from Culver Cliff, about five leagues from the east end of the Isle of Wight. We got the Ship off; but making much water, we proceeded with her to Portsmouth, and got her docked. Eleven feet of keel were put on; and it was providential that the damage happened in the after part where there was but little dead wood, for otherwise the Ship would have foundered. On her leaving dock, having got our guns and stores again on board, we sailed through the Needles with a fair wind. Nothing occurred until half across the Bay of Biscay, when we observed a Ship in chase of us considerably a-stern: this she continued for two days; on the third we lost sight of her.

Every thing in these Seas was new to me; and long before we came in sight of the celebrated Rock of Gibraltar, I had forgot my disappointment, and felt as happy, perhaps happier, than if I had obtained a supply of money: though poor, I felt I was independent; and confiding in a bountiful Providence, I *took no thought for the Morrow*. We discharged our lading at the old Rock, and proceeded to Minorca; but had scarcely made that Island when a Zebec appeared in chase. We still continued our course, supposing her to be a Spaniard: accordingly prepared for Action. At eight in the evening she began to fire her prow Guns at us, a compliment which we immediately returned with our stern Chasers. The Zebec had much the advantage of us in sailing: we soon commenced close

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Action, which continued for two hours and an half; when she boarded us with an hundred and eighty men. Not being exactly prepared for such a visit, and having neither cutlasses nor pikes, we were reluctantly compelled to jump down the Hatchways in order to save ourselves from their fury. Such of our companions as could not escape from the Quarter Deck, were either killed, or wounded in a most dreadful manner: our Captain and Supercargo were literally cut to pieces. When the Algerines discovered that we were English, their violence abated, particularly as they had been towed out of Mahon Harbour that very morning by some of our Men of War's Boats. To add to our distress, a violent gale had come on; all our rigging was shot away, and the Ship lay in such a Trough of the Sea, that we were in great danger of losing her Masts. The gale did not cease until the fifth day after our Capture; when they sent their Boats on board for our men. The Algerine Captain came with them, and to our great surprize exerted himself to repress, and even to chastise that love of plunder which his followers had indulged. Having put our Ship into as good a condition as we could, we were permitted to proceed to Port Mahon Harbour; and on our arrival were put into quarantine. The Admiral, hearing what had passed, sent two of his Surgeon's Mates to assist in the care of our wounded, many of whom were in a most deplorable state. On being released from quarantine, they were sent to Bloody Island, and but few returned.

By the death of Captain Betson, the command of the Neptune devolved on Mr. Stephen Munday, chief Mate; under him, therefore, we sailed for Leghorn, and after continuing there for several weeks without obtaining Pratique, at length bent our course for the last place of destination, Smyrna. During the passage, not being able to weather Strombolo, we bore up in an heavy gale of wind, and ran to leeward of that Island; but had nearly been lost before we passed the Faro of Messina. Off the celebrated Island of Candia we anchored for one night. At Smyrna we repaired the Ship; took in a lading of fruit; and touching at Gibraltar for water, arrived safely in England after a voyage of eleven months.

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The Shore was pleasant enough after so long an absence ; but, as Tom Tackle was poor, his Finances urged an immediate departure from it. I accordingly entered on board the John and Zachariah, bound to St. Kitts, then lying off Stone Stairs in the River, Joseph Inches, Master. Our first Convoy was the Advice, of 50 guns, Capt. Haddick, under whom we sailed from the Downs to the Motherbank ; and there waited, until another Convoy was appointed to Cork, the Loo, of 40 guns. Barbadoes was the first land we made. On our arrival at Basse Terre, St. Kitts, we took in a lading of sugar, and sailed for Sandy Point.

It was at this place that a trifling circumstance again set me adrift : the Captain had struck me, and as I felt without cause ; I determined therefore to leave him ; but my mode of executing this intention was as singular, as it was rash and perilous. One Sunday evening, it being calm weather, I began by turning all the Beef out of the Steep Tub, which I destined for the conveyance of my clothes : then having lowered it down over the side, and myself with it, I swam with all my might towards the shore. Here I found a tremendous Surf running ; my poor tub was upset, and a young Shark wishing to make his supper of me, I was obliged to practise every stratagem in my power to save myself, and the only shirt I had left. At length I succeeded in terrifying my enemy, and reached the shore without any other hindrance.

I was now blest with all the liberty and freedom of choice the most enthusiastic Philosopher could desire : but however captivating such blessings may be in idea, I preferred the discipline of a seafaring life, and making what haste I could, went to Deep Bay, where I shipped myself on board the Constantine ; a large Sloop laden with rum for Ireland. I now crossed the Atlantic to Dublin, and then again to Basse Terre where I was discharged. It was now a long time since I had been cheered by the smiles of a Parent ; friends I had none ; of money I had little enough : but I had commenced my Career as a Sailor, and was not to be daunted by finding I was left alone to make my fortune. With these ideas I again shipped myself, without loss of time, on board the Brig Lucretia, Captain

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Watts, bound for Charlestown, South Carolina, with a cargo of rum and sugar. After a passage of about twelve days we returned laden with rice and Indian corn; when I took an amicable leave of my Captain. Being heartily tired of the West Indies, I employed myself in drogging * sugar, until a Ship should offer that was bound for old England. During this interval I fell in one day with my old acquaintance of the Zachariah, just arrived from America, whose Steep Tub I had capsized in the surf. He upbraided me for leaving him, though his own violent behaviour was the cause.—I retorted the language of truth and sincerity; and having thus had my Say, and finding he wanted hands, I at length consented to go again with Captain Inches. We loaded with sugar and rum, and arriving safe at Hull, were all discharged. My old Master, indeed, wished me to remain until he was ready for another voyage, but my finances would not admit of paying a lodging for four or five months.

Not finding any immediate employment at Hull, I resolved to seek for it in the port of London: but I was out in my reckoning, for I there found Sailors as plenty as Shingles on Deal Beach. The only resource that now offered was an old acquaintance of my father, who kept a lodging-house for Sailors, and had received many favours from my family: here, at least, I expected a kind reception. The Master of the house was from home; but the daughter was not wanting in hospitality, until, in the frankness of my heart, thinking Honesty was the best Policy, I made known my real situation: adding, that I would honestly pay her father whenever it was in my power. To my astonishment and dismay, I found that tenderness does not always predominate in the female character, at least in the civilized part of the globe: the countenance of mine hostess immediately changed, and I remained in no very pleasant state of mind until her father appeared.

The night was considerably advanced when the Master of the house arrived. His daughter took care that his heart should not be taken by surprise; and the natural hypocrisy of his character prompted him what conduct to pursue. I at first received a broadside of unmeaning civility; was desired to sit down, and

* A drogger is a Shallop, or Schooner, employed to convey sugar from the Plantations to the Merchantmen.

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asked if I had got a lodging. I replied, that “Thinking my father’s friend would provide me with one, I had not inquired for any.” This staggered his politeness, but did not alter a feature of his countenance: his protestations of regard were renewed with fresh warmth, nothing was ever so unfortunate as my arrival; he expected a young man every minute to whom his only bed was engaged; had he but known it before it would have made him too happy; “*but as it is, I am obliged, reluctantly obliged, my dear Mr. Hunter, to say I have no room. So late at Night too!—Let me advise you, my dear Sir, to make haste, for otherwise you may not get admittance any where.*”

Indignation raised my otherwise dejected spirits, which were not exactly prepared for such a mixture of unmeaning protestation and selfish distrust; and as the House door closed in no very gentle manner upon me, I resolved never again to cross its inhospitable threshold. It was now Midnight. The streets of Wapping offer nothing very inviting that could induce a man to choose them as a place of repose. For some minutes I walked on like one who had been stunned by a sudden blow; until a watchman roused me from my reverie by exclaiming, “*Whither are you bound, Friend?*” Even his hoarse voice seemed kind, after the treatment I had received; and I immediately answered, “*To look for just such a man as you are; for a Watch House is the only Lodging I am likely to procure to night.*” The man stared in my face; and finding I was in earnest, conducted me to that drear abode; where I however found a good fire, and slept very comfortably until the morning. Having thus recruited my spirits, I thanked the honest Watchman and Constable; and then worked a Traverse through and across all the lanes in Wapping to find a lodging suitable to my circumstances. Nor was it long before I discovered one in a well-known Alley: the terms were adapted at least to my pocket. I was to pay one shilling per week for sleeping on a bed of flocks, about half an inch thick; my food consisted of sheep’s feet, or as they are more fashionably styled, Sheep’s trotters. I remained six weeks in this Sky parlour; when, notwithstanding all my economy, my

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purse began to grow as contracted as my stomach. This induced me to try what the India House might produce, for I resolutely persevered in giving the inhospitable dwelling of my father's friend, a good Birth. My efforts were successful; and having obtained a letter from Captain Egerton, which made me truly happy, I bade adieu to my Sky parlour, and Sheep's trotters, and went on board the Lynn East Indiaman, then lying at Deptford. We sailed to Gravesend to complete our lading, and then proceeded on the voyage to Bengal. Every thing went on favourable until our arrival in that river; when in proceeding up, I experienced another trial for my strength of mind: off Fulst the Ship grounded on a quicksand, and was completely wrecked. With the rest of the Ship's Company I was again at liberty to go just where I pleased: but Providence had now blessed me with a Friend, who lightened every difficulty which it was my duty as a Christian to surmount.

In this Ship I first commenced an acquaintance with that worthy, warm-hearted, and benevolent Seaman, Mr. William Locker*, who died Lieutenant-Governor of Greenwich Hospital. We made the best of our way to Calcutta; and, as he was going home in the Lapwing, Captain Chyne, I procured a recommendation from my Commander, to be received on board the same Ship; in which Mr. Spearing†, at present one of the Lieutenants of Greenwich Hospital, was Midshipman.

The first day, after leaving St. Helena, we fell in with a shoal of Dolphins, and in a few hours caught five hundred; when the Captain ordered us to desist. We then proceeded on our voyage, until we struck soundings in the English Channel. Our anchors being unstocked, as is the custom in Indiamen, (which, by the bye, I think very absurd and wrong,) we found great difficulty in guying and steadying them, in order to get the anchors in the stocks; owing to the heavy rolling of the Ship: for it blew hard at S.W.; and, with thick hazy weather, we had a very heavy

* A Biographical Memoir was given of Governor Locker, in our 5th Vol. page 97.

† See NAVAL CHRONICLE, Vol. XII, page 281.

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Sea. We at length placed the Anchors where the sheet and spare ones ought to be; and having bent the cables, anchored in the Downs: our passage from St. Helena was made in six weeks and three days. We next proceeded for the River, and arrived at North Fleet about the 22d of March, 1750, when all hands were again discharged. Captain Francis Cheyne was the best, and most complete Seaman, I ever sailed with; and I profited accordingly: there was not any thing done, or that could be done on board a Ship, but what he was perfect master of.

Nothing is more trying to a Seaman, both in the King's, and in the Merchant's Service, than the manner in which the best and ablest hands are turned adrift, the moment their labours are no longer required. Well would that man deserve of his Country, who should suggest some remedy to this custom: he might not only remove the necessity of Pressing, but establish a continual supply of able Seamen, who would be ready to embark at the shortest notice. For want of this, how many Boys are reduced to beggary; and then driven to the most desperate resources for a livelihood. The professional life of a Seaman renders him thoughtless and improvident; and when he is thus suddenly turned adrift from the Element to which he has been accustomed, he literally feels, as the old Adage expresses it, *like a Fish out of water*.

I now again, to avoid the Spectre of an empty purse, went to London, and engaged myself to work as a Rigger; in which employ I continued for several months; until an offer came across me of going out to South Carolina, in a very handsome little Ship called the Live Oak, and I believe the first ever constructed with that invaluable timber. Our Voyage was concluded in a few months; when I was again adrift, and again engaged myself to work as a Rigger.—And here let me advise other young men, who like me stand alone in the world, to follow my example *Let what will happen, my Boys, Head up! and bear it*. My worthy friend Mr. Locker one day came to my relief, and as I well remember in the year 1752. He told me that he was going out in the Houghton East Indiaman, the

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Hon. Richard Walpole*, Commander; and begged that I would once more be his Shipmate. I accordingly procured an order from Captain Walpole to be received on board, and sailed from Gravesend to the Downs; where, owing to the negligence of our Pilot, the Houghton struck on the North Sand Head; and had she not been a new Ship, must have been lost. She thumped with so much violence as to lift her Masts; but as the tide fell our striking ceased. The weather was at this time so severe, that I had nearly been frozen to death whilst on service, in carrying out the Stream Anchor: for never did I suffer more from cold. With the next flood we hove the Ship off, and then ran into Plymouth to dock her. Proceeding on our Voyage, we arrived at the Isle of Java, and took in store of wood and water; sailed through the Straits of Sunda and Banca with the Monsoon in our favour; received a Pilot at Macao, and, passing through the Bocca Tigris up Canton River, moored at Wampoo. Here we took in our cargo, floored with china, and then chests of tea; and the Trade Winds having shifted in our favour, proceeded to Prince's Island on our Voyage home. In the Houghton I finished my career in the Merchant Service.

It was now long since I had been cheered by the sight of a relation; and being very desirous of once more receiving my worthy Father's blessing, I prepared to enjoy that support. It was in a Collier that I worked my passage down to Sunderland; whence I walked, in about two days, to Edinburgh, that method of travelling suiting me best. As I approached the well-known haunts of former days, every Tree, and Cottage, seemed to claim an acquaintance with me; and even to this day, when I recollect what I felt on first beholding my Father, I forget that I am an old man: Our joy cannot be expressed. I had as many

* The Honourable Captain Richard Walpole, of the Houghton East Indiaman was Son of the late Horatio Lord Walpole, Brother to the present, and Nephew to Sir Robert Walpole, afterwards Earl of Orford. The Hon. Capt. Townshend, R.N., took Mr. Walpole first to Sea, and died during that Voyage. Capt. R. Walpole particularly distinguished himself in an action with the French about 1756. We hope on some future occasion to give a life of this distinguished Officer from original materials; which have escaped the researches of Mr. Coxe.