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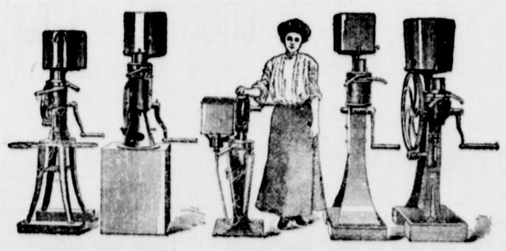
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A SEA PICTURE CRITIC

He Knew All About Ships and the Wild Ocean.

ART COMMENTS OF A SAILOR

The "Death of Nelson" Reminded Him of How 'Arkness Come Off the Main Yard—The Blood Red Sky Without a Cloud That Foretells a Storm.

Crude perhaps and curious, the outcome of a life apart, sailormen have yet an appreciation of the arts, writes David W. Bone in the Manchester Guardian.

Once in the Walter gallery I was looking at "The Death of Nelson." There was a man with the look of a seaman standing near. He had a slight smell of drink and was chewing tobacco. He, too, was interested in the picture, and, recognizing me as seaman-like, he said something, and we got to talking about Nelson and his times, about ships and pictures. "B'gad, mate, them fellers" (the painters he meant) "knowed what they was a-doin'. Look at that 'ere glim" (lantern). "Looks as its trimmin' was forgot w'en they brought th' admiral down. * * * An' them eyes," pointing to a wounded seaman in the near foreground, "them's th' eyes o' poor 'Arkness wot come off th' main yard las' voyage an' struck th' fife rail full on!"

He told me of the accident, how it happened, and by his eyes and rude, simple speech I saw it all. As plain before me as the figure of the stricken seaman I saw 'Arkness come off the main yard, clutching wildly at the sheets and lifts as he fell. I heard him strike the rail with a sickening thud and lie stretched. I saw the running figures on the deck, and—"'e never larsted th' night. We buried 'im out there. Taltal it was," said my speaker, involuntarily twisting a shoulder to an imaginary southwest.

There was a sea picture, a ship coming up to the Isle of Wight—clean curving sails, a good sense of movement and a fine, breezy atmosphere. "Jest wot it is," said my friend, "'omeward bound. Let 'er go, boys!" a burst of enthusiasm that made some visitor glance around, alarmed. "'Omeward bound it is!" There were other fine pictures, but we did not feel that we had a right to do more than look at them and admire. With sea pictures it was different. They were our world, and who had the right to criticise the way a sea was moving off the sky if we had not? Too often had we watched, anxious eyed, for a break in the clouds not to know the way of wind on the water, the scud of a cloud breaking free in a welcome shift. Well we knew the curve of a standing sail and the relation it bore to the sense of movement.

For a city of the sea Liverpool has no great representation of her foremost industry on her chamber walls. Sea pictures have apparently no attraction for her chiefest citizens. There was little call for sea critics downstairs, so we went to an exhibition of modern art in the upper galleries. Here we found ourselves properly confronted. "Setting Sail After a Blow" it was, a large canvas, a ship pitching heavily in the swell of a recent gale and the crew putting the canvas on her. It held a great message for my mate (black smoke and an ever throbbing screw had not yet dulled his sea fancy). He was highly pleased. "Them seas wot ye gets off th' Plate!" He wanted to show some word of cheer, to swing his right hand to the left shoulder in seamanlike admiration, but the cold gray eye of a tall hatted official was upon us—"Huh, sailors!"—and there was a group of young ladies near by worshiping at the shrine of a corporation purchase, so he contented himself by nudging me furiously. "That's wot I calls a picture," he said.

A sunset over water claimed our attention. A blood red sky with no clouds, only a slight density near the horizon. I said it was remarkable, perhaps unreal. "That's where ye ain't in it, mister! Look a' here! If ye wos t' take all th' colors in th' locker so's ye 'ad lots o' red an' yeller in, ye'd find a sky t' match it. Ain't ye never 'eard o' what them dagos calls blood o' Chris'—them dagos wot loads ye ballest in th' Plate?" I had not heard. "Well, it's a sky like that, an' it comes afore one of them 'pamperos.'

"Min' I wos lyin' in Monte Video oncet, an' we 'ad a sky all blood red an' never a cloud, an' th' fishin' boats wos all comin' in; not rowin' shipshape, same 's me an' you 'ud do; them shovin' th' oars 's if they wos pushin' a barrer." He spat into a dark corner and said something more about dagos, then continued: "Nex' day we 'ad a gale. 'Owlin', it was, an' her drivin' into it same 's we wos off th' Horn, an' a big German bark driv' down on us an' took th' fore to'gal'n'mast out o' 'er an' th' boom an' started all th' 'eadgear. Two ships wos driv' ashore, an' that's wot comes out o' them skies wot they calls th' blood o' Chris'."

It was an impressionist picture that annoyed my mate—an impression of a scene in dock, with masts and funnels and hulls all mixed up. The coloring was good, but the ships might have been ninepins or egg boxes or anything. At first he was perplexed, then amused, then indignant. "Oh, ——!" he said. "What's this? Ships b'gad, or I'm a Dutchman!" He burst into a fit er rude laughter. "Ships it is, mister, an' look at them tawps'l yards! Ships wi' tawps'l yards below the main, an' a hangman's gibbet fer th' mizzen gaff. Them fellers 's got some cheek, mate. That's wot I calls it—cheek—t' be paintin' things like that. 'Oly sailor! Look at them."

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