

A SUMMER TRIP ACROSS THE ATLANTIC.

BY ONE WHO HELPED TO LAY THE CABLE. DEAR MARCUS—You, who have listened with credulity to the whisperings of wiseacres, and have followed with eagerness the foreboding phantoms of mock wisdom—who have expected that time would fulfil the despairing prophecies of the newspapers, and that the disasters of last year would be repeated in this, attend to the tale of the successful laying of the Atlantic cable.

I dare say, now that you have read so far, your wonder at receiving so big a parcel by the post is a little allayed. I presume you do not forget the promise you exacted from me in June last, when you bade me good-by on board the Great Eastern. As you were leaving the ship, with a certain sweet thing (who shall be nameless) upon your arm, you said, "Good-by, old fellow, mind you drop us a line when you get back, and tell us all about it." Now do you remember?

To tell you all about it would be simply ridiculous. I am well aware that, in common with all other Christian gentlemen, you see the Times daily, and that you have had the accounts forwarded to kind papers from time to time by our historian, Mr. Deane. I shall, therefore, confine myself to such matters as have not been narrated in the daily papers, and will endeavor to amuse you for a few minutes with a little "Great Eastern" gossip, and try to give you some insight, however slight, into the daily life on board the great ship.

A small paper packet accompanies this letter. Do not throw it away. It is of exceeding value, a pearl of great price. It is not one of Dr. Gregory's far-famed powders, nor is it a portion of sand scraped from the roadside. It is something far more precious, though it may not appear so to the naked eye. It is one of the pearls of the Atlantic Ocean, that came up on one of the grappling-ropes, and which I picked out from the interstices of the same, by means of great patience, an old penknife, and the point of a breastpin.

If you do not appreciate it yourself, make a handsome present to some of your scientific friends, and they will love you and venerate your name forever after. I will give you, however, one word of advice. Do not let the world in general know that you are the possessor of such an invaluable treasure, or you will be tormented out of your life. Every post will bring letters in strange handwritings, that will worry a man of your nervous temperament into a fever. There comes a rat-tat at the door, and in a minute a budget of letters is handed in, in all kinds of envelopes and external coverings, and directed in every species of calligraphic character, with none of which you are acquainted. You have a vague idea that the big blue letter is a gentle reminder from Mr. Snippet, "that you would greatly oblige him by settling his little account;" but on opening it you find, to your delight and amazement, that it is only from little Mudlark, the amateur geologist, whom you once met for five minutes during a morning call, and who, strange to say, has taken upon himself to write to you. Through four sides of a sheet of note-paper he goes on to say that, "through the medium of the daily press he has watched the progress of the truly national work with great interest; that he is sure that your untiring zeal and energy have mainly contributed towards the glorious success; and that when a grateful government raises you to the peerage, no one will rejoice more sincerely than he. He asks you to send him—should you oblige him with a small quantity—only a few grains—of ooze?" This is a fair sample of the curiosity-begging letter, but they are numerous in number, and diverse in sentiment. One correspondent (of course a lady) ventures to ask "if she may enrich her photographic album with the counter-presentation of so distinguished a character as yourself;" another would feel more than grateful if you would give him a short piece of the "magic rope" for the Smithsonian Museum; and a third requests a small present of some kind, say "a model of the paying-out gear," "the grapple," or "a yard of the grappling-rope." Take warning, therefore, and keep a discreet silence on the subject of the ooze.

noted in any way with the Atlantic telegraph. Seems it not sad, on the completion of a great work, the dream of years, that the prime mover of the whole affair should be unable to participate in the rejoicings around him, but should be obliged to send his congratulations and receive his well-merited honors on a bed of sickness, prepared for him by over work and over anxiety for a great cause? When we got to Beerhaven, all our fair fellow-travellers took their leave, and left us alone. This was sad indeed; but one cannot be dull on board a ship like the Great Eastern, where so much of interest is daily going on.

There were now several arrangements to be made before we started on the real business of the expedition. Some thousands of tons of coal had to be taken on board, and for this purpose nearly a hundred of the native peasantry had been engaged. Their pay was to be 5s. a day and their rations, and yet, notwithstanding the munificence of the stipend, devil a bit would they work. No, they were full of excuses. "Oh, beaded, your honor, I'll do as much work as any man, but in a coal hole." "Put me in the open fields, your honor, to lay-mowing or cow-milking, and I'm the boy that will tire out the parish; but, by jabers! 'twould tear the soul out of any man to work all day with his mouth so full of cluders that he can't spit." And so on, through fifty or sixty. The end of it was, that they all had permission to go, and the 5s. per diem was given to the ship's men, who were glad enough to get it, and willing to work.

The Great Eastern is a wonderful ship, but not until you have lived on board her for at least a week are you fully aware of her size. Every day one comes across something new that strikes with amazement. As an instance of this, let me mention the shorings of the tanks. It is exceedingly unpleasant to have to perform the journey necessary to see them, but in the end the adventurous traveller is well repaid. You cannot see much after all, except what is revealed by the light of an oil lamp for in these regions darkness reigns supreme.

What this part of the ship was used for before the tanks were erected I have not an idea, but now it presents the appearance of a dead forest, all the trees of which have been roughly trimmed. The amount of timber used for supporting the tanks is simply appalling, and must be reckoned by shiploads. Huge beams stretch in all directions, vertical, horizontal, and diagonal, tiring the eye by their similarity and numbers, and giving an idea of almost unnecessary strength. This may be so long as the ship is at rest, but when she begins to roll, she alone knows how, it must be work of extraordinary solidity, and put together with great engineering skill, that will bear up against a dead weight of 2000 tons pressing upon it in all directions. Another remarkable spot is the ship's ice-house, where were stored some 100 tons of ice and nearly 20,000 pounds of dead meat. Another spot worthy of notice was the farm-yard in the bow of the ship. Here was a flock of 114 sheep, a herd of 10 oxen, a milch cow, and 36 pigs, besides 300 head of poultry. By closing the eyes and simply listening to the chorus of bleating, lowing, cackling, and crowing, one imagined oneself in a large farmyard in the depths of Hampshire rather than on board the Great Eastern. On July 12 we sailed from Beerhaven, and by 3 P. M. on the following day we had effected the splice with the shore end of Valentia, and had fairly started on our journey across the Atlantic.

The voyage, as of course you know, was one of uninterrupted prosperity. We steamed slowly but surely ahead, and the cable passed noiselessly and continuously over the wheel in the stern for fourteen long days and as many nights. The insulation was always perfect, ditto the continuity. In fact, everything was managed so well, and all possible accidents were so wonderfully guarded against, that had it not been for one little incident that rather woke us up, I am afraid we should have regarded the laying of an Atlantic cable as one of the simplest operations possible, and nothing to make a fuss about. The night of July 17th will always be easily remembered by all who sailed in the Great Eastern on that occasion. This was the night on which the "foul flake" occurred. I dare say you are rather wondering what a "foul flake" is. I will try and tell you. As the cable was leaving the tank, and as one of the coils nearest to the circumference was sweeping inwards towards the "eye," passing, in its course over the flake of cable next beneath it, a rough piece of yarn or a projecting wire, I don't know which, caught in four or five of the coils below it, and dragging them out of their normal positions, took them bodily into the "eye" of the coil, and so on out of the tank and into the trough along which the cable travels to reach the paying-out gear. The mischief was done in a minute, in far less time than it takes to describe, and it was a marvel to all on board that so complicated a knot could be tied in so short a time. It could hardly be called a knot; it was a wondrous entanglement; what would be called in the west of England a "terrible harl." You remember last year, when you were sitting in the summer house (you know where I mean), holding a skein of silk, while a certain "sweet young thing," to whom I have alluded before, was trying to wind the aforesaid silk on to a reel, that either owing to your unsteadiness or clumsiness (of course yours) the silk got into a regular mess, which took the lady and yourself the whole of that afternoon to unravel. If you recollect the above fact (as of course you do not), and if you can call to your mind's eye the appearance presented by that skein of silk, then, and only then, you will have some idea of the "foul flake," only you must imagine each thread of silk to be more than an inch in diameter, and nearly as stiff as the kitchen poker.

The instant the mischief occurred the ship was stopped, and the engine was reversed. Mr. Canning and the other chiefs were at the scene of accident in a moment. The case looked hopeless, and the first determination was to cut the cable and buoy it till daylight, for to add to the misfortune, the night was as dark as pitch, and the rain was descending in torrents. I wish we had had one of the Davenport brothers on board to help us out of the difficulty. It was certainly such a knot as no human hands could have tied in so short a time, and it seemed highly probable that no human hands, however dexterous, could have untied it. No one shall ever persuade me that the far-famed "Gordian" was a "knot" upon our friend's head of July 17. However black our prospects may have looked at one time, they all cleared up after a bit, and this extremely knotty point was solved to the satisfaction and delight of all. I feel inclined to take liberties with the poet, and say— "Of Alexander, now no more, let poets tell, To our Sir Samuel greater praise is due, For while with patience he untied them well, The knotty tangle cut his knots in two (promised thee)." After about half an hour's puzzling and humoring, the mess was kind enough to yield to persuasion, combined with not a little force, and we were enabled, to the unspeakable joy

of all, to proceed on our journey as if nothing had happened. Although the chronicle on board the Great Eastern had nothing to do save to write "unable to participate in the rejoicings around him, but should be obliged to send his congratulations and receive his well-merited honors on a bed of sickness, prepared for him by over work and over anxiety for a great cause?" When we got to Beerhaven, all our fair fellow-travellers took their leave, and left us alone. This was sad indeed; but one cannot be dull on board a ship like the Great Eastern, where so much of interest is daily going on.

Everybody who did duty in the tank was compelled, by the rules of the Telegraph Company, to wear a particular dress. This dress was made of canvas and comprised trousers and jacket in one piece, the whole being made to lace up the back. No pockets were allowed, so that no evil-disposed person or persons could possible surreptitiously calculate to do damage to the cable. To this garment there was only one entrance, through the back, and when once the wearer was inside, he found it difficult to get outside again without the assistance of a friend. As these clothes were made rather full round the waist, "allow for the stoop," you gave a unique, not to say improving, aspect to the figure; and, to add to all, the company provided a pair of boots, not of the most improved shape, made without any nails in the soles, so that the "shoe-nail" theory of the cause of accidents would be no longer tenable.

There was one personage of note on board, who, by some mishap, has escaped notice in all previous accounts. This was the ship's laureate, a poet of the most refined thought, a peerless Penyanon in his way, who always commemorated the little events of our voyage in a few short lines of poetry, which I should think, for rhythmical elegance, beauty of expression, and regularity of metre, are without a parallel in the whole range of British literature. I will give you a few samples. For instance, when we had passed the spot where the cable parted last year, the poet sang thus:—"The spot is passed, and we are good speed making. When we laid last year in our undertaking; Heaven seems smiling on us, the weather is fair and bright. There is no doubt yet, has the telegram shows any night: Kind spirit watch over us, and spread your wings for our joy as you are able. And grant us the laying of our communication cable." Again, after the raising of the cable of 1865, he says:—"In the annals of history we all do know Napoleon and Hannibal led armies through snow; But show me your records and I will yield, Such men as Mr. Samuel Canning and Mr. Cyrus Field. Who, with willing hearts and minds, and heads eyes, and with the help of all on board, to rise, splice, and proceed with the long-lost Atlantic cable."

These are merely two samples chosen from among nearly fifty specimens. You will kindly observe, as the showman says, that the two last lines of both these stanzas (and this remark holds good for all the others) end respectively in *able* and *cable*, and that as he nears the end of the verse, his Pegasus puts on a spurt and runs clean away with the bit, composed of the rules of prosody, between his teeth. On Friday, July 27th, we landed the shore end of the cable in Heart's Content harbor, amidst salvos (whatever they may be) and vivas, British cheers, and the firing of cannon. If you will kindly imagine the excitement, it will save the trouble of a description. Thus one of the most successful voyages on record was begun and ended on a Friday. After a fortnight's sojourn at Heart's Content, during which the intervals of work were filled up by innocent amusements, and the men had been visited by governors, bishops, and high potentates of every degree, and had given one or two state feasts, at which everybody congratulated everybody else, and each of the swells of the expedition declared that there never were such nice men in the world as his colleagues, we set sail once more for the purpose of grappling for the lost cable of 1865. I don't suppose there were ten men in the whole of England and America who really were perfectly sanguine as to the ultimate success of the experiment, and of those ten men Mr. Canning and Professor Thomson would form one-fifth. Of course, on board the ship we all said "that the thing was a certainty," but I don't believe that there were many who, in the private recesses of their own cabins, did not shake their heads and look a little doubtful. Of course, I never did such a thing; but then, you know, the exception proves the rule.

We reached our destination (Iat, something and long, something else) on the 12th of August, and the first thing that was done was paid out for the first time. The work was naturally a good deal of excitement during this first attempt, and a small crowd of people might be seen watching the dynamometer during the whole day. The excitement rather fell when we learnt that we were drifting wrongly, and there was no hope this time. There was a little excitement, however, as the grappling-rope came up. Now was the time to secure the precious ooze of which so much had been heard; and as the last few fathoms of the rope came over the bows, a small band of naturalists gathered round it on all sides. Some were content with merely picking at the rope with a sharp instrument, while the more cunning collected the drippings in basins, with an eye to the preservation of the sediment. This last soon became the popular "dodge," and the one most generally adopted on subsequent occasions. It takes about an hour and a half to pay out the two thousand fathoms of grappling rope, and a similar time to pick it up again when there is nothing on the end. When we had a prize on the grapple, the latter operation was performed more slowly, and occupied five, six, or even seven hours. Both manœuvres are effected by means of colossal machinery worked by a 70-horse power engine.

I am not going to describe every separate attempt at grappling at length, as this would only tire without interesting you; nor shall I try to describe the alternations of excitement and despair which at times prevailed on board the ship. That these alternations existed must be evident to all, and I should only fail were I to attempt a description. Some gentleman who was on board last year likened the rise and fall of spirits to the mercury in a barometer, and with his permission (I don't know who it was) I will "cotton" to the idea. On August 15 we grappled again, and to our great joy the dynamometer told us we had hooked the cable; barometer very high, and continuing to rise as the rope was hauled up. While attempting to buoy the cable, after raising it one thousand fathoms from the bottom, a splice "drew" and we lost

it again; barometer very low. On the 17th we actually saw the cable. We began to pick up early in the morning, and by 10:30 the grapple was above water with the cable of 1865 hanging over its flukes. The strain on the cable was very great, and the enthusiasm on board the ship was tremendous. I never did before, and never expect again, to hear such a cheer as that with which the appearance of our lost friend was greeted. Almost before the cheering had died away, and before the cable could be secured, it parted and returned again to its ocean bed; barometer very low. We had now learned two things; first, that the cable could be raised to the surface, and secondly, that the strain on it was too great when raised in a single light. It must evidently be raised, we now knew, in at least two, or, still better, in three lights. The plan was to get two lights partially raised from the bottom, and then the Great Eastern could grapple between these two and bring it to the surface.

On the 19th we grappled, and succeeded in raising a light one thousand fathoms from the bottom, and buoying it successfully. We grappled on the 22d, and twice on the 25th, without success on either occasion; barometer awfully low. People began openly to shake their heads and look very wise. This was cheerful. On the 27th the Albany (one of our consort ships) told us that she had brought a light of the cable to the surface and had buoyed it there. Of course we had nothing to do but to pick up the buoy, splice the cable, and set sail for Heart's Content. We first noticed that this buoy had shifted in the night thirteen miles away from its former position—something "fishy" evidently. On picking up the cable which it held, we found it to be only a loose piece, two miles in length, and, to crown all, we found that the light buoy placed on the 19th had broken adrift. The barometer fell with a crash; in fact, I wonder the glass was not broken. On the 28th we grappled and failed. On the 29th we shifted our position and went eighty miles to the eastward, where the ground was clear and the water shallower (1800 fathoms).

On the 31st we hooked cable, raised it a thousand fathoms from bottom, and buoyed it. On September 1st the weather was lovely, sky blue, sea calm. By 7:30 P. M. having hooked the cable (about three miles west of light buoy) we began to haul up. By 8 the "Medway" (which had been grappling three miles to west of "Great Eastern") signalled that she "had hooked cable." We now had the cable in three places, each three miles from the other, exactly what we wanted. Mr. Canning ordered the "Medway" to haul up quick and break cable," so as to leave us a free end. This order was obeyed and accomplished within a couple of hours, and then the Great Eastern began to pick up her grappling-rope for the last time. By 12:45 the cable appeared above the water, and by 3 A. M. on September 2 it was firmly secured and the end had been taken to the testing-house. By 3:30 a loud, prolonged, and universal cheer announced that satisfactory signals had been sent to and received from Valentia, and by 6:30 the splice had been made, and we were steaming once more towards Heart's Content; barometer high, and continued so until the end of voyage. It is currently reported—I don't know with how much truth—that when the gentleman on duty at Valentia saw the light on the slide of the galvanometer begin to move, he was so astonished (I suppose that he was not even thinking of the cable) that he ran from the room as one possessed, and shouting "The ship! the ship!" roused the whole house.

We reached Heart's Content on September 8th, and landed the shore end amidst universal enthusiasm. The cheering was immense, and Messrs. Canning, Clifford, and Cyrus Field had to submit to the uncomfortable process of chairing. I never want to be chaired. I don't think that a man shows off to advantage under the circumstances. He looks rather like a two-year old in "baby jumper," and is sure to struggle with his arms and legs in an exceedingly undignified manner. Your knees get close up to your chin, your head falls between the shoulders, the "fall" of your back becomes "bowed," while the parts beneath the waistcoat assume unto themselves a "fall." One hint. If ever you expect to be chaired, have your hair cut, don't wear spectacles, and be sure not to put on a long mackintosh and a white wideawake. Such a combination looks comic. We sailed from Heart's Content for England on the 9th. All the work was done, and we had now only to pass the time as pleasantly as we could. Captain Anderson displayed his skill as a conjurer and necromancer on one evening, and delighted his audience. For an amateur he is wonderfully clever, and does all the ordinary "sleight of hand" with cards quite like a professional. Mr. Oliver Smith, the brother of the chief electrician, showed us his power as an electrobiologist, and compelled several of the ship's crew to perform extraordinary feats, making them fight, sing, play at snoballing, or follow him about like cocks and hens at pleasure.

As we were going up the Channel we betook ourselves to our old amusement, the drama. A play was written expressly for the occasion by Messrs. Deane and Poore, entitled *Contention; or, the Rope, the Grapple, and the Yankee Doodle*; which, I need hardly say, consisted of a series of songs and hits at the successful voyage. Everything was done in correct style, including the advertising, and we had a regular "sandwich" parading the deck, carrying a famous sensation poster, concocted by Mr. Dudley. The performance went off with great *clat*, and applause was liberally awarded.

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