



The South-West by a Yankee

Joseph Holt Ingraham

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Zimmerman, in his excellent essay upon Solitude, has described man, in a "state of solitary indolence and inactivity, as sinking by degrees, like stagnant water, into impurity and corruption." Had he intended to describe from experience, the state of man as "Cabin passenger" after the novelty of his new situation upon the heaving bosom of the "dark blue sea," had given place to the tiresome monotony of never-varying, daily repeated scenes, he could not have illustrated it by a more striking figure. This is a state of which you are happily ignorant. Herein, ignorance is the height of bliss, although, should a Yankee propensity for peregrinating stimulate you to become wiser by experience, I will not say that your folly will be more apparent than your wisdom. But if you continue to vegetate in the lovely valley of your nativity, one of "New-England's yeomanry," as you are wont, not a little proudly, to term yourself—burying for that distinctive honour your collegiate laurels beneath the broad-brim of the farmer—exchanging your "gown" for his frock—"Esq." for plain "squire," and the Mantuan's *Georgics* for those of the *Maine Farmer's Almanac*—I will cheerfully travel for you; though, as I shall have the benefit of the wear and tear, rubs and bruises—it will be like honey-hunting in our school-boy days, when one fought the bees while the other secured the sweet plunder. This sea life, to one who is not a sailor, is a sad enough existence—if it may be termed such. The tomb-stone inscription "Hic jacet," becomes prematurely his own, with the consolatory adjunct *et non resurgam*. A condition intermediate between life and death, but more assimilated to the latter than the former, it is passed, almost invariably, in that proverbial inactivity, mental and corporeal, which is the well-known and unavoidable consequence of a long passage. It is a state in which existence is burthensome and almost insupportable, destroying that healthy tone of mind and body, so necessary to the preservation of the economy of the frame of man.—Nothing will so injure a good disposition, as a long voyage. Seeds of impatience and of indolence are there sown, which will be for a long period painfully manifest. The sweetest tempered woman I ever knew, after a passage of sixty days, was converted into a querulous Xantippe; and a gentleman of the most active habits, after a voyage of much longer duration, acquired such indolent ones, that his usefulness as a man of business was for a long time destroyed; and it was only by the strongest application of high, moral energy, emanating from a mind of no common order, that he was at length enabled wholly to be himself again. There is but one antidote for this disease, which should be nosologically classed as *Melancholia Oceana*, and that is employment. But on ship-board, this remedy, like many other good ones on shore, cannot always be found. A meddling, bustling passenger, whose sphere on land has been one of action, and who pants to move in his little circumscribed orbit at sea, is always a "lubberly green horn," or "clumsy marine," in every tar's way—in whose eye the "passenger" is only fit to thin hen-coops, bask in the sun, talk to the helmsman, or, now and then, desperately venture up through the "lubber's hole" to look for land a hundred leagues in mid ocean, or, cry "sail ho!" as the snowy mane of a distant wave, or the silvery crest of a miniature cloud upon the horizon, flashes for an instant upon his unpractised vision.

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