

Extracts from **THE LOG OF A SEA-WAIF**, by Frank T Bullen. (my bolded characters)

### CHAPTER I. MY FIRST SHIP.

Many boys clamour for a sea life, will not settle down to anything ashore, in spite of the pleading of parents, the warnings of wisdom, or the doleful experiences of friends.

... In my own case matters were quite otherwise. I belonged to the ignoble company of the unwanted. In spite of hard usage, scanty food, and overwork, I ridiculously persisted in living, until, at the approach of my twelfth year, an eligible opening presented itself for me to go to sea. Being under no delusions whatever as to the prospect that awaited me, since I had known intimately those who had experienced all the vicissitudes of a sailor's life, I was not unduly elated at the idea. Nevertheless, **food and shelter were objects peculiarly hard of attainment ashore, while I felt satisfied that at sea these necessaries would be always provided, even if their quality was none of the best.**

... It was a bleak, gloomy day in January when I first beheld her. ... Everything wore a pinched, miserable appearance. Climbing on deck, I found such a state of confusion and dirt reigning as I could hardly have believed possible. Owing to the parsimony of the owner, not even a watchman had been kept on board, and, in consequence, the decks had not smelt a broom for a month. The cargo and stores were littered about so that progress was gymnastic, while in every corner and hollow lay the dirty snow.

...

Presently the mate came towards where I sat, shivering and solitary, on the windlass end, and made me understand that I was to come ashore with him. He conducted me through a labyrinth of mean streets to a **spacious building in a wide thoroughfare, around which were congregated many little groups of seamen of all nations.** We entered the place at once, and soon reached a large bare room crowded with seamen. Here I was told to wait while Mr. Svensen went to seek the captain.

While I stood bewildered by the bustle of the crowded place, I heard **occasional hoarse demands for "Three A.B.'s an' one ordinary for Pernambuck!" "Cook an' stooard for Kingston, Jamaica!" "All the croo of the Star o' Peace!" and similar calls, each followed by a general rush towards the speaker,** accompanied by a rustling of discharges in the air as their owners sought to attract attention.

After about an hour's wait I heard the cry of "Croo of the *Arabella* here!" which was followed by the usual rush; but, to the disappointment of the watchers, the whole of the crew had been already selected. One by one they squeezed through the crowd into an office beyond, whither I managed to follow. I was too much amazed at the hurly-burly to notice who were to be my future shipmates, but I paid a sort of awe-struck attention to **the reading of the "articles."** Doubtless much excuse must be made for the officials, who have to gabble the same rigmarole over so many times each working day; but I certainly think some attempt might always be made that the essential parts of the agreement should be clear to men who are about to bind themselves for a long period to abide by it. In our case, the only words clearly accented, heard, and understood by all, were the last three, "no spirits allowed."

**Each man then signed the articles, or made his mark, ending with myself,** when I found I was entitled to receive five shillings per month, without any half-pay or advance. **Each of the men received a month's advance, in the form of a promissory-note, payable three days after the ship left the Downs, "providing the said seaman sails in the said ship." None of them lost any time in getting away to seek some accommodating (?) shark to cash their notes at an average discount of about forty per cent., most of the proceeds being payable in kind.**

This important preliminary over, I was free till next morning, when all hands were ordered on board by ten o'clock.

Extracted from Bullen, Frank T, *The Log of a Sea-Waif: Being Recollections of the First Four Years of My Sea Life*. You can download or read online at [gutenberg.org/ebooks/36657](http://gutenberg.org/ebooks/36657) .