

PAPERS.

I.—ON THE HISTORY OF NAVAL TERMS, PART II.,

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In a paper read before the Society on the 5th of May, last year, I endeavoured to point out that the study of the History of Naval Terms, though hitherto almost entirely neglected, is worthy to be prosecuted with care and attention. For the purpose of classifying the details of the subject, which must necessarily be very miscellaneous, I observed that it might be convenient to distribute them under the two heads of *philological* and *historical* enquiry. The first of these would relate merely to the history of words as such, embracing topics connected with the English language, as compared with other languages, or with its own earlier condition. The second would include the consideration, not merely of the technical terms themselves, but of those changes in the progress of shipbuilding, navigation, and commerce, which are indicated by the existence of the terms, and their transmission from one country to another.

I ventured also to suggest what seemed to me a convenient method of prosecuting the enquiry, viz., by comparing our own nautical phrases with their synonyms in four languages of Northern Europe, and four of Southern Europe. By such a comparison, I conceived that we might, under the first aspect of the subject, elucidate some of the less obvious linguistic affinities, which subsist between ourselves and our neighbours; and, under the second, throw some light on international relationships and national characteristics, so far at least as they are connected with life at sea.

In the former paper, I limited myself almost entirely to what was *philological*. In my present remarks,* I wish to invite your attention rather to what is historical; but before I proceed to the second part of the subject, I may offer to your notice a few more illustrations of the first. The word *ship* itself was made the occasion of some remarks in the previous paper. I

* This paper was prepared for the press, and the proof was corrected when the writer was in haste and absent from Liverpool; and probably some errors have escaped his notice.

might have added that we have in our own language three words—*ship*, *skiff* and *skipper*—which illustrate those very interchanges of consonants, which come before our observation, when we compare this first and most obvious of sea-terms with its equivalents in other Teutonic languages. Again, in the terms *shipper* and *skipper*—originally the same word, but now so different in meaning, that no one, at least in Liverpool, can confound them—we have a good instance of the power which words possess to disengage themselves from a common root, by a mere difference of spelling, till they become absolutely distinct in sense. “Nothing is more common,” says Mr. Trench, in his latest work,* “than for slightly different orthographies of the same word finally to settle and resolve themselves into different words, with different provinces of meaning, which they have severally appropriated to themselves, and which henceforth they maintain in perfect independence one of the other.”

We may take up the consideration of a few other terms, almost at random. The word *cruise* might cause us some perplexity at first sight, but when we notice its synonymous terms in the Romance languages—*crociare* (It.), *cruzar* (Sp.), and *croiser* (Fr.), we see at a glance its past history, as well as its fitness to express the crossing from shore to shore, and the transverse courses of a ship at sea. Our word *mizen* is derived indirectly from *medius*, and in German it becomes *besahn*. We have here the change of D into Z, and of M into B (strictly according to rule), just as in the former paper we had an instance of T passing into N. What we call *cavass*, is expressed in Dutch by *zeildack*—“sail-cloth”—and by similar phrases in the other northern languages: but the Italian term *canavezza* brings us back to the Latin “cannabis,” and by help of the German “hanf,” compared with the Sanscrit, we learn the curious fact, that “*cavass*” and “*hemp*” are actually the same word.

As instances of old English words, or early forms of words, preserved in the dialect of sailors, I may mention the following. In *hatchway* we have the good old word “hatch,” which is hardly preserved elsewhere, except perhaps in the proverb, “to leap the hatch,” in the sense of running away. In some local dialects, “loo” is used as a verb, in the sense of “to shelter,” and we see that it is identical with the nautical phrase *lee*, when we con-

* Trench on the Synonyms of the New Testament, p. 17.

sider how "*leeward*" is pronounced by sailors. *Boom* is the same word with "beam," and in a form nearer to the German "*baum*." So *spar* is another form of "spear."

But leaving now what is purely philological, let us turn to the second part of the subject, which I proposed to make the main topic of our consideration this evening. We pass from the first to the second part of the subject, from the philological to the *historical*, when we consider the active interests of human life in connexion with the study of words. Each new invention or improvement is the means of sending a new stream of vocables into the language of every country where the invention or improvement is adopted. And if this remark is generally true, it is peculiarly applicable to the seafaring life, which keeps up the intercommunion of nations with one another. Thus the adoption and propagation of a new naval term will very probably indicate some improvement in the build, the rig, or the working of a ship; and a close and careful enquiry may lead us to the source whence the improvement came, and enable us to learn its subsequent modifications. More might be said concerning the links between the language of sailors and the progress of human affairs, but this is enough to shew how the subject may be historically illustrative of national life and international relationships.

It is perhaps not easy to draw the line very steadily between the two branches of enquiry, which I have endeavoured to discriminate; but we may safely class under the historical division all the cases in which the human element predominates over the verbal. I may illustrate my meaning by recurring to the word *mizen*, which was the subject of a few philological remarks above. Then we were considering the word; but now we are turning to the history of the thing denoted by the word. It is a very singular fact that what we call *fore-mast* the French call *mât de misaine*, while our *mizen mast* is the mast nearest to the stern. Of course two corresponding groups of words are connected with these two circumstances: in the French vocabulary we find *étais de misaine*, *haubans de misaine*, *hunes de misaine*, &c., all associated with the fore mast; and in our own we have a large ascending series, from the *mizen stay-sail* to the *mizen topgallant-sail*, all in the after part of the vessel. And yet the words *misaine* and *mizen* are undoubtedly the same, both having their origin in the Latin "*medius*." Now here we have a question of shipbuilding, not of consonants or vowels—of things, not of words. The question is—what

changes of position did the middle-sized sail undergo, so as to have left *mizen* in one position of the English vocabulary, and *misaine* in another of the French? I am not able to answer this enquiry; but probably a close examination of early materials would afford an explanation of it.

This illustration may excuse the remark in passing, that the comparative study of naval terms may not be without its utility. It is easy to imagine a concurrence of circumstances, in which a vessel might be lost by the assumption that *misaine* is synonymous with *mizen*. In one of the Dictionaries of sea-terms,* which have been placed in my hands, I find the following note. "In the year 1782, the author, being then first lieutenant of a French line of battle ship, taken by Lord Rodney's fleet in the West Indies, was enabled from his knowledge of French sea-terms, to make the prisoners always assist in working the ship during the passage home, the head-sails being mostly entrusted to their management. It is but justice to add, that in the dreadful hurricane in which "*La Ville de Paris*," "*La Glorieux*," Centaur and Ramillies foundered, the uncommon exertions of these French seamen may be said to have preserved the ship from a similar fate." Such an occurrence is enough to shew that this subject has its aspect of usefulness, as well as of mere curiosity.

But to return to what was more immediately before us, one of the first particulars in which the human interest is conspicuous in the nautical dialect, consists in its tendency to personification. A sailor's thoughts and feelings are centered in his ship. He looks on all outward objects as if they were subservient to her motions. He *brings the wind aft*. He *raises* (or rather *rises*) *the land*. And more than this; his ship is to him like a living creature; he speaks of her *waist*, her *head*, her *eyes*. So it is in all countries, and so it has been in all ages. The Portuguese *becque*, and the Roman *rostrum*, are ready illustrations. A certain passage of Thucydides might be adduced, in which pieces of timber near the prow are called by a word which might be translated "ear-caps." The Chinese, and several other nations, retain the custom of painting an eye on each side of the bows of their boats, and are even said to have a superstitious notion, that the boats cannot see their way without it.

But not only does the sailor personify his ship as a whole, but he has a very animated way of personifying the various parts of it. He speaks of

* Vocabulary of Sea-Phrases, by a Captain of the British Navy, in two parts, English and French, and French and English, 1799. (Preface, p. 10.)

horses, camels, cat-heads, yard-arms, &c. It would be a curious enquiry to trace the modifications of this practice in different countries. In Portuguese a *cat-head* is called *Turco*; in Italian the *cap* is called *testa di Moro*. I believe, that by a careful examination, we might detect features of national character under this fanciful phraseology. I am not able to explain why the *mizen-yard* is called *burro*, "a donkey," in Spanish; but I seem to be reminded by this phrase of the country of Sancho Panza. The *bobstay*, or the rope which ties the bowsprit to the cutwater, (the "*wasserstag*," or "waterstay" of Germany) receives in France the lively appellation of *soubarbe de beaupré*—and the *bowsprit-shrouds*, or the lateral ropes in the same part of the ship, are called in Italian, *mostaccie del copresso*—while I have been told that certain spars, (of which I am not able to give an exact description), sometimes placed on each side of the martingale below the bowsprit, are called *whiskers* by English seamen. How amusingly do some national characteristics of outward appearance, to which I need not allude more particularly, seem to connect themselves with these seafaring expressions. I will mention one other word in this connection, because it is peculiar to the English language, and I am unable to conjecture its derivation. I allude to the word *companion*, which denotes the covering over the descent from the deck to the cabin. The Germans denote it by the simple word *kappe*; but the Spaniard finds a more picturesque expression in his broad felt hat, and he calls it *sombrero*.

I believe it will be found that the naval terms in one language are very seldom translations from those in other languages. We have an exception in the synonymous words *cutwater* (Eng.), and *tagliamare* (Ital.), one of which may be presumed to be a translation of the other: but such exceptions are rare. It is more commonly found that the words used by our sailors are corruptions of what they have borrowed. This, I imagine, is the case with our term *hammock*, which appears in some of the Teutonic languages as *hang-matte*; unless, indeed, the Indian derivation suggested in some dictionaries be correct.

Before we proceed further, it is proper to observe that some nautical phrases (like *companion*, which was mentioned above), are quite peculiar and national in our vocabulary. Such, for instance, is our word *grog*, the associations with which are not always degrading, as may be illustrated, if my memory is clear, in what we are told of Captain Back's celebration of his discovery of the source of the Great Fish-river. So again the various

uses of the term *jack* are probably quite confined to our English tars, except when they are the subject of quotations by others. I might enumerate several expressions which are unique, such as *jib*, *top*, *yard*, &c. But the best illustration which occurs to me is supplied by the word *holystone*, which have received the singular name of the *Bible* and *Prayer-Book*. The sailor's couplet may be known to many :—

“ Six days a week we work away as well as we are able,
And on the seventh we holystone the deck, and scrape the cable :”

and a landsman who has slept on a Saturday night on board a man of war, and been awakened early on Sunday morning by the noise overhead, will not easily forget what is meant by *holystoning*. No one will hesitate to say that the freak, which likened these stones to the Bible and Prayer-Book, is thoroughly English.

If some terms in our naval vocabulary are unique, others are universal, or at least common to a great number of nations. Thus, the *cook* and the *captain*, necessary persons in all ships, are called by the same names (more or less modified) in all the eight languages which I have chosen for comparison. Again, I find that the word *Brigantine*, the derivation of which seems very doubtful, has the same range of extension ; the abbreviation *brig* being with us distinguished from the longer word, to denote a slight difference of rig. The same remark is applicable to *anchor*, which is a Greek word, and is still used by all European nations, without excepting the Russians ; and there is a poetical satisfaction in observing that the name of this symbol of hope is everywhere the same.

The main point of interest, however, in this portion of our subject, relates to those terms which are common to two or three languages, and the introduction of which into our own tongue appears to indicate some historical fact connected with trade, navigation, or shipbuilding. Travellers on the Continent have an amusing illustration of what necessarily takes place in this respect, when they hear the words “*ease her*,” “*stop her*,” “*back her*,” on a Spanish steamboat, or on the Italian lakes. If we were ignorant of Watt's native country, the nautical vocabularies of Europe would shew us whence the steam-engine came. And what is true of the improvements and the corresponding phraseology which we have communicated to others, is equally true of what we have borrowed ourselves. We must remember that our nautical history is related alike to the North and

the South, that we owe something to the Mediterranean, and something to the Scandinavian world. We should therefore expect to trace curious hints of the past, by comparing our nautical vocabulary with those of other nations. A few detached instances may be taken, in the first place. We find that the word *cargo* appears in the South as *chargement* (Fr.), *carica* (Ital.), *carga* (Sp.), but that the corresponding terms in the North are totally different. Is it not reasonable to infer from this that our early commercial relations were closer with the South than with the North? Again, if we examine the phrases which relate to shipbuilding, we observe that the expression *chains*, as used in its technical sense, is a translation of a Spanish word, having the same meaning and applied in the same way. May we not conjecture that there was some circumstance in the build of the early Spanish ships, which was common to our own early ships, though it has now disappeared, leaving only the name? On the other hand, we detect the word *gaff* in the Northern languages, and not in the Southern; and it seems to me something better than an idle fancy, which imagines that we have here the token of a peculiar rig borrowed from the bold voyages of our piratical ancestors. So, too, the word *timber*, which appears in the Norwegian and Swedish vocabularies, while it is not used by the sailors of Southern Europe, nor indeed by those of Germany, contains in itself a suggestion of the place of those forests, which supplied some of our earliest and most abundant materials for shipbuilding.

A few terms deserve to be examined more closely. Let us take the expression *forecastle*. The invention of gunpowder has caused this fortress to disappear; but the name is a memorial of its position. The word itself remains, though the 'castle' itself is not 'to the fore.' So we have in French *chateau d'avant*, and in Italian *castello*. But in the North the words denoting this part of the ship are quite different. And I believe the true explanation to be this, that the lighter vessels of the Northmen were without those large structures at the bow, which were used in Southern Europe, after the example of the Romans. The gradual diminution of the *forecastle* in English ships, from its appearance as a large floating fortress, to its present condition, when nothing is left but the name, may be traced in existing pictures and engravings. I am not able to refer to a representation of the "Great Harry," built by King Henry VII., which is usually spoken of as the first ship of the English Navy. But drawings of the embarkation of Henry VIII. at Dover, in 1520, from a picture at Hampton

Court, and of the "Henri Grace à Dieu," built by the same monarch, from one at Greenwich, are familiarly known.* Next in order may be mentioned a view of the Spanish Armada, engraved from some tapestry in the House of Lords, which is now destroyed: and some years later we have the famous ship of the Commonwealth, the "Sovereign of the Seas," built in the year 1637 † and lastly, we may refer to a medal, struck to commemorate the appointment of James II. as Lord High Admiral. ‡ We need not proceed further, for a simple inspection of these authorities will sufficiently shew the downward progress of the *forecastle*.

The next term I select as containing in its own history a record of progress in shipbuilding, is *rudder*. Our common notion of a rudder, is that of an apparatus attached to the stern of the vessel, and worked by a tiller, or by ropes. But when we find that the word *ruder* in German denotes an oar, as well as a rudder, we are led to speculate on the origin of the word; and a little examination shews us that the two were originally identical. The German *ruder* is in fact our word "rower," and all steering in the ancient world was accomplished by means of paddles on the side of the vessel near the stern. This is made familiar to students of classical literature, by the Greek and Latin words for the steering-apparatus being usually expressed in the plural. But the assertion is equally true of the ships of the Northmen; and few persons are aware how late in the middle ages this practice continued. We find the use of the paddle-rudder exhibited in the Bayeux tapestry, and in Joinville's Life of St. Louis, we observe "gouvernaus" in the plural, as "gubernacula" and "guberna" are used in Latin. Indeed, it is said that the first indication of the hinged rudder at the stern, is on the gold noble of King Edward III.§ Thus we see how large a chapter in the history of shipbuilding is opened before us, by considering a single word.

I may remark, that this inquiry into the derivation of the term "rudder" throws a light on the history of a word, the origin of which is very difficult to conjecture at first sight. I allude to the term *starboard*, (German

* It is enough to refer to the wood-cuts in the useful publication, called "Old England," Nos. 1417 and 1432.

† See the curious Tract, entitled "The Commonwealth's Great Ship, commonly called the Sovereign of the Seas." London, 1653.

‡ "Old England," No. 1978.

§ See Mr. Smith's Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul, pp. 143-147.

Steuerbord.) I believe the primary meaning of this word to be simply "the steering side"—*board* being the side of the ship, as we see in the word *overboard*—and the right side of the vessel, as you look towards the bow being that on which the steering-paddle was commonly placed in the water. This word can be traced back to the time of Alfred,* and the French *tribord* is a corruption of it. I must not stay to inquire whether *larbord* is merely a playful antithesis to *starboard*, as some suppose, or a compound formed by the aid of some word denoting "the left hand," as others have suggested. Its synonym *backbord*, which is found in some of the Northern languages, and in French is corrupted into *babord*, explains itself from the position of the steersman engaged with the starboard paddle-rudder. †

My last illustration is drawn from the history of a Greek naval term ; but this will be excused, from the sacred interest connected with it. In

* A correspondent refers me, both for this word and the antithetical term *backboard*, to King Alfred's version of Orosius, B. i. c. l. in Othere's account of his voyage.

† The paper, as originally read, contained some speculations on the history of the word *steerage*, which must evidently at first have had some connection with steering, though its popular usage seems now to associate it more closely with the bowsprit than the rudder. An illustration was sought from an ancient vocabulary, entitled "The Seaman's Dictionary, or an Exposition and Demonstration of all the Parts and Things belonging to a Shippe," and published in 1644; where the following passage occurs (p. 103): "The *stieridge* is the place where they steere, out of which they may see the leech of the sailes, to see if they be in the wind or not." But the following extract, from the communication of a friend, is more to the point:—"In large ships, before more complicated machinery had superseded the use of the 'tiller,' this was fitted to the rudder-head which came up through the counter of the vessel, in a space below the poop deck, and there traversed from side to side, as moved by the ropes communicating with the wheel situated on the quarter deck, immediately before the poop. This part of the vessel where the tiller worked, would naturally be called the 'steerage,' and in case of crowded accommodation might be appropriated to the stowage of stores, or even occasionally for sleeping berths or the hanging of hammocks, so long as the traversing of the tiller was not interfered with. It would generally be a comparatively dark, rough part of the ship, and both in position and aspect inferior to the cabin and state apartments. By association of idea, therefore, I take it that in all vessels, whether 'flush' or having poops, the term 'steerage' has become applied to those cabins or places of accommodation for passengers or second officers, which, though in the immediate vicinity of the main cabin, are inferior and secondary to it. In merchant vessels, the steerage, ordinarily speaking, is the vestibule of the cabin at the foot of the companion ladder, and occupies all the space enclosed between the cabin door and the bulk-head, separating the after part of the vessel from the main hold. Where there is a deck laid on the hold beams, all the space fore and aft between the after bulk-head shutting off the steerage and cabin, and the fore bulk-head shutting off the fore-castle, (in which the crew generally live), is technically termed the 'twixt decks.' Now, when a vessel's 'twixt decks' are appropriated to passengers, it often happens that the portion immediately before the cabin bulk-head will be separated from the rest, and fitted up rather more comfortably, and the berths there be charged a higher price. Here again, by association, this space will be then termed 'the steerage,' and the passengers occupying it be styled 'steerage passengers.' It may also sometimes be designated by the title of 'second cabin;' but that term, to my ear, implies a style of accommodation, &c. above 'steerage.'"

Acts xxvii. 40, the word rendered "mainsail" in the authorised version, and translated "litol sail" by Wicliffe, is *artemon*. It is a word which occurs in no other Greek writing; but, very singularly, it is found in the modern French vocabulary. There it denotes what we call the "mizen-sail," or the sail nearest the stern.* But it is established on satisfactory grounds that in the narrative in the Acts it really denotes the "fore-sail." This is curious and perplexing. But an examination of intermediate authorities by Mr. Smith, in his standard work on the Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul,† has cleared up the difficulty. In the modern Italian it is obsolete, and its equivalent is *trinchetta*; but it occurs in the sense of "foresail" in Dante and Ariosto, and also in certain contracts entered into by the Genoese to supply the ships of Louis IX.‡ The change in phraseology is in fact due to a transference of the sail's position. Thus we find that the history of nautical terms may throw a light, not only on the build and rig of ships, but even on difficult parts of Holy Writ.

By taking other Greek terms into our consideration—by examining the modern nautical vocabulary of the Levant—by adding the phrases used by Russian sailors in the Black Sea and the Baltic—we should have widened our view of the subject; and a larger induction might have modified some of our results. But so extensive a comparison of languages would involve no little labour; and probably enough has been said to recommend the subject to the Antiquarians of this town, which, if not the first, is certainly not the third, seaport of the world.

II.—CONCLUDING ADDRESS AT THE END OF THE SECOND TRIENNIAL PERIOD,

By the Rev. A. Hume, LL.D., Hon. Secretary.

AT the close of the first cycle of the Society's operations, I complied at once with the request of the Council, in addressing a few words to the members, by way partly of summary and partly of suggestion. A similar

* We have already seen that *mât de misaine* in French is our *foremast*.

† pp. 153-162.

‡ Jal's *Archéologie Navale*, quoted by Mr. Smith.