Two Years Before the Mast Study Guide

Two Years Before the Mast by Richard Henry Dana, Jr.

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

Two Years before the Mast is Richard Henry Dana, Jr.'s memoir of a Harvard undergraduate becoming a sailor while collecting hides up and down the California coast and returning home in the treacherous dead of winter, richer for the experience.

Richard Henry Dana, Jr., signs up for a 2-3 year voyage aboard the commercial brig Pilgrim, hoping to cure his eyes, which have been weakened by reading books as a Harvard undergraduate. He goes aboard trying to look like a seasoned sailor, but writing afterward, he realizes that being a good sailor comes only with real experience. Dana's initiation comes by learning to climb the rigging while suffering seasickness. After three days he is ready to join in the monotonous routine of maintaining the ship and altering sails to fit weather conditions. After crossing the equator, Dana feels himself a true "son of Neptune," and while doubling Cape Horn, amidst violent storms, he proves his mettle. Towards the end of the outbound trip, as tempers rise in the crew, Dana and friend Ben Stimson move to the forecastle, where Dana feels more like a true sailor.

Pilgrim takes her place in collecting up and down the California coast a seemingly impossible quota of 40,000 hides. He learns enough Spanish to become the ship's contact with the locals. When Capt. Thompson flogs two sailors for no valid reason, Dana vows to bring Thompson to justice but admits the crew has no right to mutiny. Turned into a beachcomber and hide-curer while Pilgrim collects more hides, Dana is bored and anxious for Alert to arrive, as the company has ordered his transfer to assure a prompt return to Boston. Any longer delay will endanger his academic career. When informed that he must find a replacement for Pilgrim, Dana sticks by the company contract but in the end pays a man to exchange.

The return voyage in a heavily-loaded Alert takes place during winter when the forces of nature seek to keep her from slipping through their fingers. Dana suffers a debilitating toothache when the short-handed crew is hardest pressed. Alert survives and makes straight for Boston, for which Dana yearns—until he reaches the bay and finds himself strangely ambivalent, living in the adventure of the last two years and yet wanting to move on. Move on he does, becoming a lawyer, and publishing the first edition of his book. He adds, at readers' requests, descriptions of his return to California in 1859/60 and reveals the fate of characters and ships.

Chapters 1-4

Chapters 1-4 Summary and Analysis

Richard Henry Dana, Jr., signs up for a 2-3 year voyage aboard the brig Pilgrim, hoping to cure his reading-weakened eyes and strengthen his body. They leave Boston on 14 Aug. 1834, bound for the west coast of North America. Writing years later, Dana naturally uses the rich jargon of the sea while describing his utter bewilderment at the chaotic order on deck. He mocks his own scrupulous performance of his first duties. In Chapter 2 Capt. Thompson lectures about the men's obedience determining their fate under his command. Dana meets first-timer Stimson and balances the beauty of the sea against leaving everything familiar. A storm brings three days of seasickness, through which Dana fights to climb the high rigging. Purged, he feels like a new person and enters into full duties.

In Chapter 3 a "spell" of fine weather lets Dana describe shipboard organization. The Captain is "lord paramount;" the Chief Mate translates the captain's will into discrete tasks and is responsible that all is done well, and the Second Mate is neither officer nor seaman, but a harried misfit. The crew forms two watches, which alternate on duty for four-hour stretches around the clock. Before breakfast the decks are swabbed and from breakfast until sundown (minus a one-hour dinner break) the men work ceaselessly. Sitting and conversing are allowed nights and Sundays. Maintenance and repairs are ongoing and the rigging must be constantly adjusted to wind conditions.

Chapter 4 describes Sundays, which on some ships includes religious services, but not on Pilgrim. Monday brings a return to work clothes and duties. On 1 Oct. they cross the equator and Second Mate Foster is demoted for sleeping on watch, replaced by Jim Hall. Pilgrim stops briefly at Olinda before speeding towards Cape Horn. By the first gale, Dana has mastered the seaman's skills and finds "reefing" sails exciting. The weather turns sharply colder as they pass the Falkland Islands.

Chapters 5-8

Chapters 5-8 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 5 bring Pilgrim to Cape Horn and violent storms in which Dana proves himself by helping furl the jib in great danger. West of the Cape they meet a whaler and see their last albatross. In Chapter 6, young George Ballmer is lost overboard and his death leaves a great hole. Dana hears at length the superstition that Finns are bad luck. In Chapter 7 Pilgrim visits Juan Fernández Is., of Robinson Crusoe fame. In Chapter 8 Dana describes preparations for landing in California, preparing to sell their cargo on-board, tarring the rigging, and painting the brig inside and out. Recrossing the equator and a working Christmas leave the crew irritable and on low rations. Dana and Stimson ask to move from steerage to the forecastle. Another Thompson harangue forever poisons relations with the crew. On 13 Jan. 1835 Pilgrim reaches Point Conception, 50 miles north of Santa Barbara, where she anchors next day, 150 days out of Boston.

Chapters 9-12

Chapters 9-12 Summary and Analysis

Pilgrim anchors off Santa Barbara, the central port on the coast of Upper California, joining the brigs Ayacucho and Loriotte collecting hides, tallow, and horns to return to Boston. They learn from the Kanakas (Hawaiians) how to negotiate the heavy surf. In Chapter 10 the brigs flee to sea ahead of a lightning storm and after the gale, Ayacucho beats Pilgrim in an impromptu race back to anchorage. The agent and passengers board Pilgrim for the trip north to Monterey. Chapter 11 has Thompson damaging his brig, showing off for his brother and the company agent, putting on extra sails before a squall hits. Dana is congratulated for climbing the rigging and clearing the mess. Seeing the passengers seasick, Dana is proud of his sea legs. By comparison with Santa Barbara, Monterey is a "Christian" (i.e., civilized) town. In Chapter 12 the crew becomes angry, being denied liberty to get Pilgrim ready for inspection by Mexican revenue officers.

Chapters 13-16

Chapters 13-16 Summary and Analysis

For ten days men, women, and children examine Pilgrim's varied cargo. Californians are "shiftless," importing all needs at inflated prices. Spanish blood is required not to belong to the lower caste. Among the elite, women are carefully guarded. Both sexes enjoy dressing fashionably and speaking in a distinctive manner. Silver and hides are the only currency. Dana begins learning Spanish and, falling back on Latin and French, is able to communicate. He becomes the ship's messenger, allowing him contact with the locals. American and British permanent settlers control trade. For the second Sunday in a row, shore liberty is denied the crew. Foster tries to demand the right but is put in his place by the captain; Foster changes greatly.

Chapter 14 brings Pilgrim back to Santa Barbara, where land parties perform "head-work," carrying heavy dried, folded hides out to row boats on their heads, for transport past the crashing surf and a three-mile pull out to the brigs. Receiving and stowing hides adds to the continual work aboard ship. The sailors worry about how long the voyage will be, as hides are growing steadily scarcer and word has it that a cargo ship larger than the California, owned by the same company as Pilgrim, must also be filled before Pilgrim can return to Boston. Rather than easing up severe discipline on the crew, Thompson "hazes" them, deepening the resentment, and adds yet another officer, Mr. Russell. At San Pedro the crew of Pilgrim offloads 40-50 tons of goods and takes on 2,000 hides over several days before a Southeaster forces them out to sea. It is the hardest and most disagreeable work yet on the voyage.

In Chapter 15 tension comes to a head as Thompson personally flogs two men, primarily because he enjoys doing so. He declares himself a "driver" and the crew his "nigger-slaves." While admitting that sailors have no right of mutiny, Dana, disgusted, vows to himself to bring Thompson to justice in Boston. Morale drops further as Pilgrim heads to San Diego, whose harbor, though well-protected from winds, is narrow. Pilgrim collides with two brigs before finding safe berth, thanks to Ayacucho's Capt. Wilson. Thompson is humiliated in front of his fellow skippers. Dana sees how more pleasant life can be before the mast of a well-run ship.

Chapter 16 takes up Sunday morning, with word that after the decks are swabbed, one watch is granted shore leave. Dana's watch wins the lots. The men bathe, dress in their best clothes, and are rowed ashore as passengers. It is delightful to be utterly free for a day. Dana and Stimson stick together, after drinking rounds in the grog-shop with shipmates in order not to appear stuck-up. They then rent fast horses to gallop out to the ruinous Presidio and the mission, where they enjoy a sumptuous Mexican meal and meet a very old man. After leave, the men return to work re-energized.

Chapters 17-20

Chapters 17-20 Summary and Analysis

The crew transfers ashore the 3,500 hides that Pilgrim has collected for pickling, drying, cleaning, and storage until their number reaches 40,000. Everything non-essential is removed from the hold, including Old Bess, the cook's pet sow. Foster deserts after being refused transfer to Lagoda and receiving a few lashes for insolence. Rewards fail to track him down as he hides in a cave until Pilgrim sails for San Pedro, where the crews of several brigs help re-float and repair a destroyed Mexican brig.

Pilgrim then sails slowly to Santa Barbara, arriving, in Chapter 18 in time for Dana's watch to go ashore for Easter Sunday. An Italian crew's singing reminds Dana of the cultured life that he has left behind. Entering a shop where the man apologizes for having nothing to serve the sailors because of last night's fandango, Dana is shocked to learn that it had been held not in celebration of Easter but as part of the mourning for his little daughter, whose funeral is an hour away. Dana rides on the beach a while with the Italians before returning to see the procession to the mission, which is anything but solemn. The padre holding crucifix awaits as bells toll. Dana wants to go inside for the funeral, but his companions speak no Spanish and cannot be left alone. Cock-fighting is staged in the square when the bull to be baited escapes, and this is followed by horse racing. That evening, crews from various nations compete in dancing. It is difficult to return to the ships. While they "tar down" the rigging, a particularly messy job, the men of Pilgrim envy the Italians, who celebrate Easter for three days ashore.

After two weeks of collecting hides, Pilgrim returns to San Pedro, where the waters are filled with migrating whales, who at first are entertaining but soon turn commonplace. One boat has a near-fatal encounter with one. Whaling is not profitable in this region. When the crew takes the easy way out of getting hides to the beach in San Juan, where cliffs rise 400-500 feet from the surf—by sailing them off for colleagues to retrieve and stow in boats below—half a dozen inevitably get caught on ledges. Dana fool-heartedly risks his life, clambering down a rope to retrieve them and put money in the captain's pocket.

Pilgrim returns to San Diego to an empty harbor. Some 20 Kanakas, left behind by the ships, live in a large bread-baking oven abandoned years before by a Russian ship. They accept employment only when the group is completely out of money. When Thompson convinces four to sail aboard Pilgrim, he assigns Dana to shore duty, processing hides.

Long Chapter 19 describes the life and occupation of Dana, the "beachcomber," curing hides. Mr. Russell is in charge but mostly eats and sleeps. Dana's companions are a huge Frenchman, Nicholas, and a group of Kanakas, primarily the literate Tom Davis, the illiterate but knowledgeable old Mr. Bingham, and intelligent, kindhearted Hope. Kanakas are intelligent, generous people, who share everything—plenty and poverty

alike—in common. They have emerged from barbarism to civilization faster than any other people.

The process of tanning fresh bullock hides, collected inland and dropped off onshore, consists of staking them in the surf for hours, soaking them in concentrated brine, stretched out to dry, and trimmed of bad pieces. It is a long process. Each of the six workers must process 25 hides a day. Initially it is backbreaking and quotas are not met. The hides are then salted, scraped, cleaned, beaten, and stored away. The work is heavy and disagreeable, but the freedom that they enjoy compensates. It also grows monotonous, but, once the set amount of labor is done for the day, the crew's time is its own. Sunday is strictly a day of leisure. Dana often visits the Kanakas or reads and writes letters in his free time. Two afternoons a week are devoted to collecting firewood, which is scarce in San Diego. Dana raises a favorite hunting dog, Welly, for hunting coyotes and game. Rattlesnakes inspire fear while the crews gather wood.

Chapter 20 describes "beach society" before turning to a decisive change in Dana's life. Several international crews visit, breaking the monotony with nightly song and dance. When the ships sail, however, they leave behind representatives who add little: the conceited Scot Robert and the alcoholic Austrian Schmidt. By the time Pilgrim has been gone six weeks, all curing is complete and the equipment cleaned and stowed. They collect 6-8 weeks' worth of wood and nearly run out of provisions before Pilgrim returns, on 18 July, with a new look to her rigging and a new man in command: Capt. Faucon. When Alert reaches Santa Barbara, Faucon and Thompson exchange commands, and Alert sails directly to Monterey and San Francisco. Pilgrim delivers music, news, water, and fresh hides to cure before leaving again. The shore contingent "burns the water" for crawfish and the Kanakas try to catch sharks by hand.

Chapters 21-24

Chapters 21-24 Summary and Analysis

By summer's end, Dana's Spanish is quite good and he has learned the history of California. Discovered in 1534 by Ximenes or in 1536 by Cortes, it is first developed and exploited by Jesuit missionaries, whose wealth is protected by the presidios. When the Jesuits are expelled from Spanish lands, the Franciscans take over. The missions' lot declines after Mexican independence, but the Indians remain virtual serfs to the harder, civil administradores sent from Mexico City, desperate to make their fortunes. Trade diminishes; credit is destroyed, and the missions decay.

Civil government is capricious, revolutions frequent, and justice swift and brutal—particularly when the accused is an Indian. Males are lazy, vain, and given to gambling; women are uneducated and not virtuous but closely controlled by their jealous fathers and husbands. Indians often risk harsh punishment to sell their women to sailors and are easy victims to alcohol. Mexicans generally abstain from drinking. California is so fertile that in proper hands it would flourish. English-speaking immigrants must convert to Catholicism. Unless they succumb to "California fever" (laziness), they would seem to be the region's future.

Chapter 22 finds Dana anxious for Alert to arrive, having obtained a letter from the company ordering him to be transferred to that crew to return on time to Boston. Any longer delay will endanger his academic career. He also wants off shore duty which, while sometimes enjoyable, will not help him advance his seaman's skill, including navigation, should that career be his fate. He has another three-month, idle wait, during which he adopts and trains a puppy, Bravo. When Alert arrives on 25 Aug., Dana goes aboard to help unload hides. He finds her wide, roomy, and "shipshape." Having seen enough of San Diego, Dana skips Sunday leave to chat with crew members left behind, learning about their outbound trip from Boston in record time. They call her a "lucky ship," fast but a bit wet forward; some of the crew sleeps "between decks." He brings his gear aboard and settles in.

Chapter 23 describes a typical day's work aboard Alert. Cleaning is more meticulous than aboard Pilgrim but marked by greater goodwill. The crew is larger and more content and the men are disciplined and motivated getting under way. All hands know their stations and execute tasks with precision. Dana has time to read. Night watches are pleasant, with "yarning" allowed among the men. Reaching San Pedro, they join Pilgrim, heavy-laden. Thompson is much changed, having a competent first mate in Mr. Brown. Dana is part of the boat crews ferrying the captain and others to and from shore, 30-40 miles a day, but it is better duty than moving hides. When no officers are aboard, they can talk with passengers and enjoy themselves ashore while waiting for the return trip. Alert races the smaller Catalina north to Santa Barbara, pulling ahead when winds are strong in her larger sails but losing overall. The chapter ends with a detailed description of Tom Davis, the "most remarkable" man that Dana ever meets, who from

22 years experience at sea, generously shares all that his perfect memory and astute reasoning have gathered.

In Chapter 24 Alert returns to San Diego and Dana resumes curing hides ashore. He is saddened that Bravo has died. In San Juan, Dana is again tasked with sailing hides from the cliffs and recovering those that get stuck on ledges. Crew mates think him a fool for taking the risk. They unload the boats in stormy seas and haul up the sails to head out only with great difficulty and sail ahead of the southwester to San Pedro for ten days. There, another educated man, George P. Marsh, joins the crew, whose story of surviving shipwreck and massacre by the natives in the Pelew Islands and a trip to California via Hawaii, greatly impress Dana.

Chapters 25-28

Chapters 25-28 Summary and Analysis

Returning to Santa Barbara, Alert finds Pilgrim and Ayacucho at anchor. Capt. Wilson boards, bringing exaggerated rumors of war between the U.S. and France, and large French war fleets operating locally. Avon leaves, ostensibly for San Pedro, but in fact to replenish legal and illegal cargo stashed on Catalina Is. to avoid paying duties in Monterey. Also in port is a "spouter" (whaler), Wilmington and Liverpool Packet, which Dana calls, vessel and 30-man crew alike, slovenly, oily, and smelly. Most are "raw hands" with hayseed still in their hair. On 12 Nov. the ships crews have a rowing match, in which the whalers are ahead until they reach the surf, where the Kanaka-trained sailors pull ahead.

As a gale blows in, Loriotte breaks her chain, goes adrift, but is brought up by the united crews. The captains rush down from shore visits and a practical race through heavy seas ensues. The four ships head to sea to ride out the storm in safety and the, return to anchorage. It leads to a dispute between the captains of Alert and Ayacucho about seamanship and a bet on speed racing, but it never takes place. On 14 Nov., Alert takes aboard a group of Mexicans for a trip to San Diego, soaking them in the surf to silence their complaining, and takes the lead in leaving port, as the largest ship around. She is determined to show the whaler what a trim ship can do.

Despite cloudless skies, a gale arises suddenly and begins tearing the sails "to atoms" faster than the crews can reef and furl. When the main royal sheet works loose, the main mast is in danger of snapping. With the brig pitching violently, it is a hard and dangerous job requiring several hours by all hands. Smaller sails are destroyed by the hurricane-strength winds. Finally, only the small, low-slung "spencers" are left intact, and Alert drifts to leeward. The gale blows unabated for 72 cloudless hours. Men begin "bending" new sails as soon as the wind tapers to normal gale strength. Change comes on the fifth day, Alert having drifted halfway to Hawaii. It takes eight days to reach San Francisco, the whole passage taking 20 days.

In Chapter 26 Alert diverts from Monterey to magnificent San Francisco bay. She stops at one of the bights (bays), Yerba Buena, where an old-fashioned Russian brig is wintering. Alert's crew visits on Sunday. Dana finds the Russians "stupid and greasy-looking" but buys from them a feather-covered winter robe. The arrival of the rainy season hampers trade up-river with San José, Santa Clara, and other locales 15-40 miles from the anchorage. Sailors must accompany the Indiana crews on 2-3 day missions in open boats that leave them exhausted. Dana is assigned to one mission, but the boat leaves before he wakes up. Alert is covered with hides being dried whenever weather permits. Crews collect firewood and fresh water while those left on board prepare oakum for caulking, manufacture equipment for the return voyage, and sew themselves winter clothing and foul-weather gear. As it rains on Christmas day, the crew is given a holiday and plum duff. Dana claims the Russians have celebrated

Christmas with great drunkenness 11 days earlier; as the Old Calendar in the 19th century is 11 days behind the Gregorian, they would have been drinking to St. Nicholas, not Christmas. This is one of the few factual errors in the book. Alert departs on 27 Dec., with appropriate cannon salutes and heads for Monterey, which Dana finds pleasantly unchanged from the year before.

In Chapter 27 Alert meets a Russian bark in Monterey, whose captain offers to carry mail to the American consul in Vera Cruz, Mexico. Crew members set to writing letters home, which arrive in a record ten weeks. Pilgrim had been waiting for Alert since mid-November but leaves for San Diego when Capt. Faucon concludes Alert must have been lost in the gales that damage so much shipping along the California coast. The crew works hard Sunday morning to wash Alert down and gain shore leave for the first time in three months. Dana tries to find a worship service to attend but contents himself with a horseback ride to the Carmel Mission and another Mexican meal gratis, and the helps collect drunken shipmates from the grog-house. The men stand in danger of being mugged by Indians or thrown in the calabozo (jail). This latter fate befalls Diana's crew. Monday's regular work is done with aching heads—the "sailor's pleasure." When George, a large boy from Boston tires of being bullied by Nat, the first mate orders a boxing match for entertainment. They bloody one another before Nat concedes and peace reigns between them for the rest of the voyage.

Alert leaves for Santa Barbara with a group of Mexican passengers aboard. Among them is a "decayed gentleman," Don Juan Bandini, who reminds Dana of characters in Gil Blas, an 18th-century French adventure novel by Lesage. Dana cultivates a friendship with Bandini's literate retainer, who helps perfect his Spanish and understanding of Mexican politics and social structure. Scraps of news from the U.S. and England are frustratingly out of date. On the trip to Point Conception, Alert meets a heavily-armed and unregistered brig, Convoy, engaged in illegal hunting and smuggling. Such ships are becoming abundant.

In Santa Barbara, the boat crew attends a fandango (wedding reception) for Agent Robinson and the daughter of the local grandee, Doña Anita de la Guerra de Noriego y Corillo. Alert's crew adorns the rigging with pennants and fires a 23-cannon salute as the bridal couple emerges from the church. At the dance, the women appear as stiff as at a religious ceremony, but the men are spirited and graceful. Bandini is applauded for his performances. Great laughter attends traditional male/female rituals. The Mexicans receive the sailors cordially. Alert sails next night ahead of a southeaster.

In Chapter 28 Alert returns to San Pedro, takes on 3,000 hides, and departs for San Diego to process them. When Pilgrim brings down her next load, Alert will have a full hold and head home to Boston. Several of the Kanakas at the oven are sick with mysterious illnesses, the curse of contract with the Western world. Hope is at the point of death. Dana is refused medicine by Capt. Thompson, but an old sailor prepares a "recipe."

Dana tells of three Americans who are ruined by overindulgence, including Russell. California arrives with mail, which may be read only after dinner and aloud, subject to

rude jokes. The carpenter, "Chips," is depressed, receiving nothing from his bride. "Sails" comforts him by tales of how his wife long ago runs off with another man, stealing him blind. Sailors ought not to be made fools of by women. On 5 Mar., Thompson orders Alert made ready for departure, a 6-8 week process. Dana is nostalgic leaving each of the ports, except hellish San Pedro. He feels the chains of his servitude being broken. In San Diego, Alert is stripped of everything non-essential.

Chapters 29-32

Chapters 29-32 Summary and Analysis

Like all ships, Alert ignores port regulations against dumping ballast and over the new bed builds a fire to fumigate the sealed vessel. While they wait to resume work, the men listen to Dana read the best parts of Walter Scott's Woodstock. Next day, the hold is prepared to receive 40,000 cured hides. Tasks are divided up to make most efficient transferring of hides from storage on shore to the ship. Dana, as an experienced curer receives the heavy job of throwing hides on a pole to have the dust beaten out of them. They are then carried on men's heads (protected by lamb's wool hats) to the boats, rowed out, and stowed away. The final task is "steeving," fitting the hides together like pages in books for maximum compactness. Alert compromises between two accepted methods. All hands singing helps the process. The crew eats a bullock a week to keep up its strength.

When Pilgrim arrives, Dana visits his old shipmates, who are condemned to at least another year in California. Stimson convinces Tom Harris for a price to exchange places. Capt. Faucon examines Hope and promises medicine when California arrives. Both ships transfer their hides to Alert and their crews help with the steeving. As the three prepare to go their own ways, Faucon, Thompson, and Robinson inform Dana that he must find someone willing to take his place on Pilgrim if he wishes to sail with Alert. Dana points out the written orders from the Company and stands up to Thompson's wrath at being opposed. When Dana offers to pay the same as Stimson, Thompson summons poor English Ben. Crew mates who like Ben complain about the rich boy taking unfair advantage of the poor. Dana once again feels an outsider. In the end, Harry May (called Harry Bluff) agrees to be the exchange. Dana is sorry to part with Harris but glad to be back with Stimson. Pilgrim returns to collecting hides, and the crews of Alert and California compete to set sails fastest. Being heavily laden, Alert behaves as though waterlogged and is soon left behind.

Chapter 30 continues the departure preparations. Alert's crew is left shorthanded by transfers and old Harry Bennett, having suffered a stroke, reluctantly being left behind. Soon afterward the sail maker also suffers a stroke and young Mellus develops rheumatism. This becomes a problem only when Alert reaches Cape Horn in the dead of winter. Sailing south in warm weather, the men prepare their winter clothing. They worry that the forecastle leaks and dry berths are limited and used in shifts. Catching the trade winds, they cover 1,300 miles in seven days. Thompson "cracks on," straining the sails. Night watches are long but all are in good humor, anticipating reaching Boston in five months. Rumors come from the officers' cabins about risking the Straits of Magellan or reversing to cross under the Cape of Good Hope in Africa.

Alert carries a passenger, Prof. Nuttall of Cambridge University who, in California, remembers Dana as a student. He has been collecting specimens ("curiosities") for the museum. Alert also carries livestock to feed the crew.

On 18 May Alert enters the "doldrums," requiring constant adjustments to the sails. Two weeks out of San Diego, Alert encounters an "Irishman's hurricane," constant rain that allows washing "California grime" out of clothes and off bodies. They cross the equator on 28 May and soon reenter the trade winds for 12 days. Alert is prepared for cold weather with new or repaired riggings, braces, and sheets, giving them time to grow limber.

In Chapter 31 days grow short and the sea cold and ugly. Alert's weight makes her perform badly in heavy swells. Everything on deck washes away. They are 1,000 miles from the Cape and truly bad seas. Some blame the captain for overloading. Old hands are divided between preparing for judgment and wasting energy watching for Davy Jones. Alert moves slowly eastward on fair winds from far out in the Pacific. On 17 June, fair weather turns suddenly to a driving bank of mist, whose danger Dana knows from the trip out. Sails are adjusted to take the coming squall. Rain, sleet, snow, and wind attack the men, still in warm-weather clothes. Hands are too cold to manipulate equipment, but time is of the essence. When Dana's toothache spreads throughout his face, he is ordered to bed, leaving the crew shorter-handed. He feels guilty but understands that without medicine he must take precautions in order to get back on duty. Thompson orders the top rigging removed for stability.

At the latitude of Cape Horn the temperature drops unexpectedly and Alert enters dangerous but beautiful ice flows, whose sublimity no artist can capture. Riding amidst the ice on a moonless night ahead of a gale headwind is nerve wracking. A collision would be fatal for all hands. On 4 July, Dana thinks of gala celebrations in Boston. In the bitter cold, men up in the rigging dare not wear gloves and risk losing their grip. As Alert is a "temperance ship," only the captain is allowed rum. The men would be happier with coffee, chocolate, or tea, but this is rationed to increase the owners' profits. Meanwhile, Dana's facial swelling increases, and he is in his bunk during the most dangerous part of the voyage, bitter at his helplessness. The men grow bitter at the captain's hesitancy to run and meet to consider mutiny. Dana advises against it. The carpenter leaks word to the mate, who tells the captain, who summons the crew and, surprisingly, talks calmly of duty during the present danger. All is forgotten.

The weather lightens and Dana, weak from inability to eat, wants to resume his duties. He is surprised to see the decks and riggings covered in ice and snow, the decks slippery as glass. As rumors fly, Thompson turns towards the Straits of Magellan. This breaks the monotony, but literature is divided on how risky this could be. The men sing lively as they climb into the rigging. A gale from the east, however, prevents Alert's attempt.

In Chapter 32 the run at the Straits moves Alert far eastward and as she turns south, the crew hopes to be past the ice fields. Narrowly avoiding the last great iceberg, Alert enters a pelting storm. Passing Terra del Fuego she falls into a calm before being hit by the fiercest storm yet, which seems to be the ocean refusing to let her slip through its fingers. Rain storms and monotony make the crew miserable. There is no more singing, joking, or laughing and, realizing that they are talking no longer about when we get home but if, the men stop discussing the future. Dana passes time by going through

memorized facts in a set order. All eat heartily, gain weight, and avoid bathing in the freezing weather. Reduced watches having to furl stiff sails in a gale is "man-killing." Without clear skies to observe the stars, they cannot be sure of their position until, on 22 July they spot the island of Staten Land, east of Cape Horn. Nuthall is not allowed ashore to collect specimens as Alert makes for the Southern Ocean.

Chapters 33-36

Chapters 33-36 Summary and Analysis

To save time, Alert runs north inside the Falkland Islands The crew is enthusiastic as it maximizes the canvas up forward, causing Alert to bound through the water as never before. It takes two men to steer her. Spirits rise as Alert enters the tropics and see again the northern constellations. They are traveling at the rate of steam ships. Quarter, clothes, and bodies are washed. Vessels require as much preparation for returning to port as for getting ready for sea at the start of a voyage. They must look good to the owners and critics; this is called "hard usage."

Early in the process, Thompson ignores the tradition that the captain makes his wishes known to the mate and leaves execution to him. As Thompson micromanages the task of staying the foretopmast plumb, Mr. Brown notes sarcastically that he is not needed, leading to an argument that amuses the men before it is taken in private. Dana provides an aside on the customary law of the sea. Brown and the steward next get into a fight, providing entertainment. The captain chooses not to interfere.

In Chapter 34 a yard falls 90 feet just after Dana steps off and has a safe grip in the rigging. Such incidents are common on ships, and once near catastrophe is past, sailors are honor-bound not to mention their fear. Escapes are joked about. Off Cape Horn, French John catches a boy by the collar as he is about to fall overboard to certain death. Beginning on 7 Aug. Alert begins "talking" with passing vessels, her first human contact in 100 days. On 18 Aug. Dana cross the equator for the fourth time. The weather turns hot and it rains a lot. They reach the "horse latitudes" in the vicinity of the West Indies and Cuba during the hurricane season. A fierce hurricane in 1830 wipes out everything in the Atlantic. Light winds and then calm precede a true tropical lightning storm. All are on deck, tense as the sails are prepared to meet it. Dana and a mate come down from the rigging just in time to see a dramatic "corposant" - ball lightning (St. Elmo's Fire) - followed by thunder and rain. The violence is stupefying. Alert is the only object for many miles, but wooden ships are rarely harmed by lightning, except if they set fires or tear them apart. The watch below, like good sailors, forces itself to sleep and dawn brings fine weather.

In Chapter 35 Alert reaches U.S. Waters and the variable weather of autumn, including the modest gales that sailors call "double-reef-topsail breezes." Thompson, being a "driver," refuses to take in sail prudently, causing the old hands to growl about the danger. When the order finally comes, the men jump into action automatically, but it is too late: Alert rolls; her decks are washed; the sails boom; the rigging lets go, and the sails then flap against the masts. The watch is sent to sleep until the storm moderates. After breakfast, Alert is put back in full sails, perhaps because Thompson had just married before sailing from Boston but also because scurvy is affecting the crew. English Ben appears near death. Dana offers learned opinions on what causes and cures the disease, missing entirely the connection to vitamin C. Off Bermuda Alert

meets the brig Solon out of Connecticut and New York and is stocked with potatoes and onions, which the men eat ravenously, raw. Those with scurvy take it pounded into liquid and recover in ten days.

Thanks to fine weather and hard work every day but Sunday, Alert is in fine order by the time she reaches Cape Hatteras. Ships are always put in best order when returning home, for reputation's sake. The standing rigging is tarred, every surface above the waterline is scraped and painted, and the brass polished. On 15 September, Alert enters the Gulf Stream. Rolling of 45° makes even seasoned hands nauseous when working in the rigging; the deck seems like terra firma.

Chapter 36 concludes Dana's story, as all hands look forward to landing in Boston and forget their various quarrels. They begin taking depth soundings. The North American coast is well documented for the composition of the bottom. Alert brings up black mud, which means that they are off Block Island. The crew sorts through its clothing, throwing overboard anything no longer needed or serviceable, and pack the rest. They eat their last "duff" and talk of plans ashore. In a fog, a whaleboat nearly runs Alert down. On 19 Sep. Alert enters bustling Boston Bay and fires guns to summon a pilot. The men marvel at sights of civilization, prosperity, and happiness long denied them. The owner is telegraphed and word spreads among the sharks on Ann St. that a "rich prize" is arriving. Dana paints the skysail poles white and stands the last of his 900-1,000 hours at the helm.

The tide and winds determine that Alert anchor for the night, disappointing the crew. Mr. Hooper, a junior partner of the firm, comes aboard and inquires about Dana, whom he last sees as a Harvard student. Hooper is amazed at the transformation. The crew is too happy to eat or sleep, but Dana finds himself apathetic. He recalls an acquaintance who had felt the same depression after his first voyage ends. Only when the friend's brother fetches him does he turn from the dream of sailing to the dream he had cherished while sailing. The next morning's labor, making ready for coming to the wharves, helps dispel this. Customs officers, agents, merchants, friends, loafers, and boardinghouse runners all stream aboard. Alert is made fast and the crew dismissed as Boston's bells ring out.

Twenty-Four Years After

Twenty-Four Years After Summary and Analysis

In 1869 Dana adds an afterword to highly-successful book, intended to bring his readers, whom he considers friends, up to date on events, places, ships, captains, crews, agents, storms, and ladies whom he mentions in the original text. During a trip around the world, Dana in 1859/60 stops in California and steams between San Francisco and San Diego on the Senator. Fortuitously, Dana's fellow passenger is the elderly retired Capt. Wilson of Ayacucho. Their conversations clearly inspires this sharing with loyal readers.

Dana opens by contrasting at length primitive San Francisco Bay in 1835/36 with the city of 100,000 in 1859. San Franciscans enjoy the amenities of East Coast life but remain hungry for news from there and Europe. No sign of the hide trade remains; the Oriental Hotel stands near where Alert's boats had beached.

Dana talks at length about religion, which is denied him in Two Years before the Mast proper. He describes the ecumenical nature of the city, mentioning that prominence of total-abstinence societies and the Vigilance Society. Dana hears how influential his book is at the time they "break out" from Mexico in 1848. As he tours, Dana finds that things he had hated are now dear. Old timers recall the old times. Many of the summary paragraphs help the reader recall incidents in the book; there are some references to page numbers. On 11 Jan. 1860, Dana sails to Asia, nostalgically leaving behind California for the last time.

Dana's last service to his readers is to summarize however much he knows about the fates of characters major and minor. Thompson is captured by natives in Sumatra, escapes, retaliates, dies of coastal fever, and is buried at sea. Dana had several times in the book alluded with rather unchristian satisfaction to Thompson's unpleasant ending. Both of the ships on which Dana sails end up being destroyed by fire, Pilgrim accidentally and Alert as part of hostilities during the American Civil War.

Characters

Richard Henry Dana, Jr.

The author of Two Years before the Mast, Dana signs up for a 2-3 year voyage aboard the commercial brig Pilgrim, hoping to cure his eyes, which have been weakened by reading books as a Harvard undergraduate. He goes aboard trying to look like a seasoned sailor but writing afterward realizes that this comes only with real experience. He also writes from the perspective of having completed his studies and earned a law degree. He frequently offers legal opinions to the readers as asides. He unfailingly writes as a salt only haphazardly remembering that jargon may be foreign to them and slowing to explain words and phrases. For the most part, he leaves readers to learn as he had—by osmosis.

Dana describes the growth curve for himself and fellow first-timer, Ben Stimson, learning to climb the rigging while suffering seasickness but then joining in the monotonous routine of maintaining the ship and altering the sails to fit weather conditions. He nearly stifles with detail. High points are crossing the equator to become a true "son of Neptune," and proving his mettle while doubling Cape Horn, helping to furl the jib. Towards the end of the the outbound trip, he moves to the forecastle and feels more like a true sailor, learning the lingo and customs.

Dana is constantly worried that with Pilgrim having to collect a seemingly impossible quota of 40,000 hides before she can return to Boston, he will fall hopelessly behind his school mates and be forced to make his living at sea. Dana learns enough Spanish to become the ship's contact with the locals, allowing him make contacts otherwise forbidden. As a member of the rowing crew, he is more often ashore than others. He has a lively interest in religion, sociology, and politics, which he exercises in writing the memoirs. He also shows himself willing to accept foolhardy risks.

Transformed into a beachcomber and hide-curer in San Diego while Pilgrim collects more hides, Dana finds himself under discipline lighter than aboard ship and learns another, rather vile, trade. The company has ordered him transferred to Alert's crew to get him home to Boston on time. When Alert arrives, Dana moves aboard and makes friends, particularly with the remarkable Tom Davis, who generously shares his wisdom and experience. He also meets the retainer of Don Juan Bandini, who helps perfect his Spanish and understanding of Mexican politics and social structure. When informed that he must find a replacement aboard Pilgrim in order to go home aboard Alert, Dana sticks by the company contract but in the end pays a man to exchange rather than let the captain force it on a poor sailor.

The return voyage in a heavily-laden Alert takes place during winter in the Southern Hemisphere, and the forces of nature barely let her slip through their fingers. Dana suffers a toothache that spreads to a general infection of his head, keeping him from eating, and forcing him to take to his berth when the already short-handed crew is

hardest pressed. Alert survives and makes straight for Boston, for which Dana yearns—until he reaches the bay and finds himself strangely ambivalent, living in the adventure of the last two years and yet wanting to move on.

Move on he does, becomes a lawyer, and publishes the first edition of Two Years before the Mast, which is an important resource when Americans rebel against Mexican rule in 1848 and join the Union. Responding to readers' requests, Dana describes his return to California in 1859/60 during an around-the-world voyage. He shares with readers, whom he regards as friends, the fate of characters and ships he has written of and compares what he sees with what he remembers nostalgically from 1835/36.

Capt. Frank Thompson

The skipper of the commercial brig Pilgrim, when author Richard Henry Dana, Jr., signs on as a common sailor, Thompson is a brutal man. On the first morning out of Boston, he warns the crew's fate is in their own hands, based on whether or not they obey orders absolutely. When, close to the end of the voyage to California, food is closely rationed and tempers are short in the crew, Thompson gives another swaggering lecture that earns him the nickname "Down-East johnny-cakes" (Chapter 8, pg. 54) and guarantees bad blood for the remainder of his command.

Rather than easing his severe discipline on the crew, Thompson hazes them, deepening the resentment. Out of sorts after leaving San Pedro, Thompson quarrels with the cook and mate but concentrates most of his ire on slow-speaking Sam. After coming to blows below decks, Thompson flogs him with a thick rope, demanding that Sam state that he will never give him any jaw again, and refusing to accept Sam's denial that he ever has spoken disrespectfully. When John the Swede asks why Thompson is about to punish Sam, Thompson orders him put in irons and, after flogging Sam flogs John, admitting that he does so mainly because he enjoys it. When John cries out to Jesus Christ, Thompson declares that he alone is the source of mercy aboard Pilgrim. Dana vows to himself to bring Thompson to justice in Boston for these arbitrary acts. Thompson brags about being a "driver," and calling all hands "nigger slaves" (Chapter 15, pg. 99). Thompson tops off his cruelty by denying the men salve and forcing them to row him ashore.

Thompson several times manifests a want of seamanship. First, driving against the wind northward from Santa Barbara to Monterey, he shows off for his brother and the company agent, putting on extra sails, which cause damage when a squall hits. In narrow San Diego harbor, he collides with Lagoda and drifts into Loriotte before Ayacucho's Capt. Wilson boards to bring Pilgrim to a safe berth. Thompson becomes the butt of fellow captains' humor. When Alert arrives in Santa Barbara, Thompson and Capt. Faucon exchange commands. Having a competent first mate in Mr. Brown and a disciplined, contented crew, Thompson is much better behaved than aboard Pilgrim. Returning to Boston during the treacherous winter season at Cape Horn, Thompson angers the crew of Alert both by excessive caution and recklessness but does not lash

out at their protests. It is said that he uses all available sails to get home to the bride he leaves in Boston two years earlier.

Dana learns that Thompson is never employed by the company again but voyages to Sumatra for pepper on Alciope. He is taken captive by natives, held ransom, escapes, and fires on his captors' village. Thompson catches deadly coastal fever, dies, and is buried at sea

Tom Harris

The watch mate of author Richard Henry Dana, Jr., for nine months aboard the brig Alert, Harris is the most remarkable man that Dana ever meets. Harris is a native of Ilfracombre, Devonshire, England, the son of a coastal skipper who died young. He leaves school to go to sea at 17 and has been at it for 22 years.

Despite a beloved mother who is a disciplinarian, through obstinacy he falls into every sailor's vice. Several times he becomes a mate but is sent back into the forecastle after bouts of drunkenness. He finally swears off liquor three years before meeting Dana.

Harris has perfect memory of everything he has experienced since childhood and extraordinary powers of calculation. No one argues with his logbook of the voyage or registry of the cargo. The mate frequently consults Harris on details. Harris has little formal education but has a firm grip of subjects in diverse fields, including political economy, steam locomotion, and celestial navigation. Dana is profoundly grateful for Harris' generosity in sharing all that he has learned.

Dana's oldest friend in the merchant marine, Ben Stimson, pays Harris to exchange places on their ships, so Stimson can get home to Boston earlier. Dana is sorry to lose his friend with whom he has spent nearly 200 hours walking the deck.

Within a year of Dana's returning to Boston, Harris finds him and looks him up, having memorized the map. As second mate aboard Pilgrim, Harris makes a bit of money and visits his mother in England. He declines Dana's help with investing or meeting his friends.

George Ballmer

A young English sailor aboard the brig Pilgrim, Ballmer falls into the Pacific Ocean while working in the riggings. Heavily clothed and unable to swim, he is lost. Ballmer had been the life of the crew and a good seamen. When hours of searching turn up no sign of his body, Pilgrim sails on, feeling a profound loss. Crew members suddenly remember him having premonitions of death and wishing he had learned to swim.

Don Juan Bandini

A Mexican passenger whom Alert carries from Monterey to Santa Barbara, Bandini seems to author Richard Henry Dana, Jr., the perfect example of a "decayed gentleman" (Chapter 27, pg. 222) in characters in Gil Blas, an 18th-century French adventure novel by Lesage. Bandini is sent by his father to Mexico for an education but wastes all of his advantages and is returning home penniless. Dana cultivates a friendship with Bandini's unnamed literate retainer, who helps him with his Spanish and helps him understand Mexican politics and social structure. Bandini is popular at the wedding reception of Agent Alfred Robinson and Doña Anita de la Guerra de Noriego y Corillo.

Mr. Bingham

One of the Kanakas (Hawaiians) curing hides at San Diego with author Richard Henry Dana, Jr., Bingham speaks but little English. His front teeth are missing, a sacrifice made by his parents when King Kamehameha dies nearly 50 years before. Bingham is touchy about white people joking about cannibalism outside New Zealand and particularly about Capt. Cook being eaten after his murder. Named for a Protestant missionary at Oahu, Bingham is a patriarch among the Kanaka, despite his lack of education. Dana learns much island history and lore from him.

Tom Davis

One of the Kanakas (Hawaiians) curing hides at San Diego with author Richard Henry Dana, Jr., Davis has been to the U.S. and knows reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Capt. Edward H. Faucon

A short, dark-complexioned man in a green jacket and tall leather cap, Faucon in Santa Barbara exchanges his command of the brig Alert with Capt. Thompson's of the newly-arrived Pilgrim. Faucon makes numerous changes in Pilgrim's rigging before sailing to San Diego. Author Richard Henry Dana, Jr., finds him from first encounter a man of "education, literary habits, and good social position," who holds things "at their right value" (Chapter 20, pg. 156). Faucon aptly quotes from Virgil.

Faucon is "a sailor, every inch of him, admired by his men, whose usual habit is to find fault with officers" (Chapter 22, pg. 167). He thus stands in sharp contrast with Thompson. Faucon goes on to command many vessels in Indian and Chinese waters and serves as a volunteer in the U.S. Navy during the Civil War before retiring to Boston. Dana sees him often and enjoys hearing Alert's crew regularly praised.

Foster

The second mate aboard the brig Pilgrim when she leaves Boston, MA, Foster is within a month demoted by Capt. Thompson for sleeping on watch. Bawled out for being a soger (lazy), Foster loses the right to be called Mister and has to live and eat among the common seamen.

Foster's father is a man of means and Foster is liberally educated but an idle gossiper and too familiar and lenient with the men. On the second consecutive Sunday that the crew is arbitrarily denied liberty, Foster breaks custom by changing clothing for shore before talking with the captain. He is dressed down, partly in public but mostly in private, returns to his work clothes, and is much changed thereafter.

In San Diego, several run-ins with Thompson and a beating short of the threatened flogging convince Foster to desert. After requests to transfer to Lagoda's crew are denied by Thompson, Foster collects his belongings, slips ashore by night, and hides in a cave for three days until Pilgrim has to sail. Thompson puts out a $20 reward, but no one finds him. When it is safe to emerge, Foster is hired aboard Ladoga and sails home. Although left short-handed, Foster's former shipmates are glad he has escaped.

Jim Hall

The second mate aboard the brig Pilgrim after Capt. Thompson demotes Mr. Foster for sleeping on watch, Hall is an intelligent young sailor from Kennebec, ME, and a veteran of several voyages to Canton. Hall proves too kindhearted for the severe Thompson, however, and a tough third mate is named to enforce discipline.

Hope

One of the Kanakas (Hawaiians) curing hides at San Diego alongside author Richard Henry Dana, Jr., Hope is a favorite of Western officers and men. Named for one of the ships on which he serves, Hope is kindhearted and intelligent, enduring hazing without complaint. Hope and Dana become "aikane," brothers who will do anything for the other. Four months after leaving San Diego, Dana returns to find many Kanakas mysteriously ill. Hope is near death. They look to Dana, with his college education, for help. Capt. Thompson refuses to give out medicine, but an old hand offers a risky recipe, whose ingredient the First Mate provides. Hope promises to take it faithfully, to rest, and to avoid exposure to the elements. Another captain agrees to provide medicine to save the useful worker.

Bill Jackson

An English sailor serving as boatswain aboard the brig Loriotte, Jackson goes to sea as a boy for the standard seven-year apprenticeship. He is 24/25 years old in 1835 when

author Richard Henry Dana, Jr., meets him in Monterey, CA. He is tall and broad, with arms like Hercules, tanned face, a pleasant white smile, and curling, raven-black hair. He has many intricate tattoos and loves to read. His captain considers him the ideal sailor, strong and eagle-eyed.

John the Swede

The best, oldest, and most ignorant sailor aboard the brig Pilgrim, John leaps into action off Cape Horn in violent storms to furl the jib. He breaks usual custom to admit after the fact that it had been gravely dangerous to author Richard Henry Dana, Jr., who had stepped up to assist him when others hold back. When John asks why Capt. Thompson is about to punish Sam, Thompson orders him put in irons and, after flogging Sam, orders John seized up and personally flogs him with a thick rope, for interfering, for asking questions, but mainly because Thompson enjoys it. With a foreigner's temper, John talks of satisfaction and revenge some day in Boston.

George P. Marsh

An English sailor who joins the crew of Alert in San Pedro, CA, Marsh is a well-educated, 26-year-old, experienced sailor. While a smuggler in France and Germany, Marsh learns French and speaks and writes English too well not to be formally educated, but he lacks the mind, character, and memory of fellow intellectual Tom Harris.

Marsh first sails in 1813 aboard Lascar but in Manila joins a schooner that wrecks on a reef and whose survivors are attacked by natives. Marsh is one of three held captive for a month. When the captain escapes but fails to send rescuers as promised and Marsh's companion dies, the natives adopt him, painting, tattooing, and dressing him like themselves, so that when he talks a companion into trading with an American ship, he is scarcely believed to be a Briton. Marsh ships to Hawaii and Monterey as second mate and walks to San Pedro after difficulties with the captain. Marsh has kept a journal of his adventures. Marsh signs on as second mate aboard Ayacucho before Alert sails for Boston. Dana is sad to part and wishes that he had asked about the truth of his early adventures.

Henry Mellus

The third young first-timer sailing aboard the brig Pilgrim with author Richard Henry Dana, Jr., and Ben Stimson, Mellus soon gets laid up with rheumatism in his feet. When Pilgrim reaches Monterey, CA, Mellus becomes a supercargo's clerk, having worked in a countinghouse in Boston. He remains in Pueblo de los Angeles, marries a Mexican woman, has a family, and grows grapes for wine. Dana visits him in 1859. Mellus dies a few years later.

Nicholas

An enormous Frenchman who cures hides alongside author Richard Henry Dana, Jr., in Los Angeles, CA, Nicholas is strong but ignorant . He has no education, but goes to sea as a boy, serves on all sorts of vessels, and fears to return to the U.S., despite assurances from Dana that double jeopardy protects him from a second trial for some capital crime. Nicolas' feet are too large for anything but custom-made shoes. He respects Dana's learning and assumes he will one day be a ship's captain. Mr. Russell, who is in charge as the hide-house, is afraid of Nicholas.

The Reefer

A sailor aboard California, The Reefer is a delicate 15-16—year-old midshipman on an East India Company ship who is waylaid to Upper California with promises that California is part of Europe. Learning the truth before California sails, he tries to flee his contract, but is caught and Capt. Arthur out of pity makes him the steward's assistant. The Reefer eventually escapes to England via Callao.

Mr. Alfred Robinson

The Bryant, Sturgis & Co. Agent in Upper California, Robinson boards the brig Pilgrim in Santa Barbara, CA, along with Capt. Thompson's brother and a handsome Mexican señora. Robinson is seen regularly sailing as a privileged passenger between collecting points for raw hides. When he fails at San Francisco bay to make provision for sailors required to go upriver on trading missions, Robinson loses the cooperation of the men. Robinson marries in Santa Barbara the daughter of the local grandee, Doña Anita de la Guerra de Noriego y Corillo. He remains in Santa Barbara and prospers. Meeting again in 1859, Robinson is cordial to Dana, despite the unflattering portrayal in the first edition of this book.

Mr. Thomas Russell

A short, round-shouldered, red-haired, one-eyed, vulgar-looking man added as an officer aboard the brig Pilgrim just before she sails to San Pedro, CA, Russell is hated by the common sailors, even before assisting Capt. Thompson in the brutal flogging of Sam and John the Swede. Russell is put in charge of the Company's hide-house ashore in San Diego, CA, supervising Dana and four Kanaka (Hawaiian) workers. He eats and sleeps alone, and does little more. Russell is later dismissed for misconduct and becomes a broken, begging beachcomber.

Sam

A tolerably good sailor aboard the brig Pilgrim, Sam is a large, slow-moving and -talking man from the Middle States. After leaving San Pedro, CA, Capt. Thompson is in a foul mood and turns much of his attention on Sam, hazing him continually. They come to blows below decks and, when Sam insists that he has not given the captain any jaw, is seized up and flogged with a thick rope. Sam feels badly about getting John the Swede also flogged for sticking up for him. As an American with some education, Sam feels utterly degraded. He no longer tells funny stories about the black slaves but simply waits for the voyage to end. When Dana meets Sam in later years, he finds that his sense of humor has returned.

Ben Stimson

Author Richard Henry Dana, Jr.'s best friend aboard the brig Pilgrim during the outbound trip from Boston, MA, to Upper California, Stimson is also a first-time sailor, son of a professional man. They have acquaintances and interests in common. Stimson and Dana stick together during shore leaves, while not appearing to look down on less-sophisticate shipmates. When Dana transfers to Alert, Stimson applies to join him, even to the point of paying for the change. Stimson pays Tom Harris, Dana's other close friend on the crew, to exchange places on their ships, so that Stimson can get home to Boston earlier.

Capt. Wilson

The skipper of Ayacucho, Wilson is a short, active man of about 50 years. A seasoned seaman, Wilson does not hesitate to board the brig Pilgrim when she gets into trouble entering narrow San Diego harbor and issues the necessary orders to bring her to a safe berth, countermanding the orders of Pilgrim's younger skipper, Capt. Thompson. Wilson's kindness and pleasant way of talking with the men contrasts starkly with Thompson's cruelty and ego.

In 1859, Dana meets an aged Capt. Wilson, a retired ranchero, as a passenger aboard the steamer Senator, running from San Francisco to San Diego. Wilson is pleased with Dana's coverage of his skill in his book. They talk over old times ships, captains, crews, storms, and ladies.

Objects/Places

The Pilgrim

Author Richard Henry Dana, Jr.'s home for the voyage from Boston, MA, to Upper California, Pilgrim is a brig owned by Bryant, Sturgis & Co. Her decks are swabbed daily with seawater before breakfast at 7 bells (7:30 AM), after which work continues until dark, except for an hour for dinner. Nights and Sundays the crew is allowed to converse and rest. Pilgrim, being captained and crewed by "swearers" forgoes religious services on Sundays. On the way out to California, she is captained by the cruel and thoughtless Frank Thompson. Young seaman George Ballmer is lost overboard shortly after Pilgrim enters Pacific waters and the crew, on short rations, is near mutiny on arrival in California.

On Company orders, Pilgrim's first stop is at Santa Barbara, rather than the custom house as Monterey. Pilgrim picks up Company Agent Alfred Robinson and other passengers before running north to Monterey. Thompson's putting on too much sail to show off causes damage during a squall and she limps, damaged, for five stormy days. Rather than easing his severe discipline on the crew, Thompson "hazes" them, deepening the resentment and flogs two sailors, largely because he enjoys it, and cancels Sunday privileges. When Pilgrim sails into San Diego harbor, she is again damaged thanks to Thompson's incompetence.

Dana is left behind to handle the curing operation while Pilgrim resumes ranging up and down the coast collecting more hides. Foster deserts and is hunted for three days before Pilgrim is obliged to sail back to San Pedro. Thompson and Alert's Capt. Faucon exchange commands and Pilgrim resumes collecting hides. With difficulty Dana asserts his right to transfer to Alert's crew for the return voyage to Boston. After this voyage, Pilgrim is sold to a New Hampshire merchant, who uses her for coastal voyages. She is destroyed by fire off North Carolina.

The Alert

Author Richard Henry Dana's home for the return voyage from Upper California to Boston, MA, Alert is a well-known "Indiaman" (large merchant vessel) owned by the same Bryant, Sturgis & Co. of Boston, MA. She is bound for Boston as Pilgrim sails and is expected in Upper California to collect some 40,000 hides. When Alert returns to Santa Barbara, CA, her Capt. Edward H. Faucon and Pilgrim's Capt. Frank Thompson exchange commands, and Alert sails directly to Monterey and San Francisco. Dana receives orders from the company transferring him to her crew.

Boarding, Dana finds her wide, roomy, and "shipshape," with fine mates, specialists, and a crew of 12 before the mast. Dana learns from them about their outbound trip from Boston in record time. They call Alert a "lucky ship," fast but a bit wet forward; some of

the crew sleeps "between decks." In seven years of sailing in the Canton trade, Alert has never had an accident of note.

Cleaning is more meticulous aboard Alert than aboard Pilgrim, but work is marked by greater goodwill. The crew is larger and more content and the men are disciplined and motivated getting under way. All hands know their stations and execute tasks with precision. Night watches are pleasant, with "yarning" allowed among the men. Capt. Thompson seems much changed, having a competent first mate in Mr. Brown.

When the hides have been carefully "reeved" (compactly stored), Alert rides low in the water as she sets sail for Boston via the Cape Horn at the height of winter in the Southern Hemisphere. The passage is excessively rough and is not helped by Thompson's rush to get home and poor seamanship. The crew nearly mutinies. It also does not help that Alert is a "temperace ship" by her articles, with only the captain allowed rum. Thompson does not make up for this by increasing rations of other liquids.

Alert makes two more voyages to California before being sold to whalers. A man whom Dana meets in Hawaii in 1860 tells of Alert's demise 9 September 1862, when the Confederate steamer Alabama captures her, allows the crew to flee, and sets her on fire.

The Avon

A handsomely-fitted American hermaphrodite brig operating out of Oahu, HI, Avon along with other vehicles trades along the coast of Upper California in legal and illegal otter skins, silks, teas, and other merchandise, in addition to the usual cargo of hides, tallow, and horns. These vessels leave much of their cargo on Catalina and other uninhabited islands and slip out of Monterey to fetch it after paying duty on a modest cargo.

The Ayacucho

A fast, handsome, 300-ton brig built in Guayaquil and named for the battle that secures Peru's independence, the Ayacucho, skippered by Capt. Wilson under a British flag, is the only vessel in Santa Barbara harbor when the brig Pilgrim arrives in 1835. She trades between Upper California and Callao, Peru, and the rest of South America. Much of her crew is from the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii). Said to be the best sailer in the North Pacific, Ayacucho beats Pilgrim in an impromptu race to the Santa Barbara anchorage. She is in San Diego, flying "the blood-red banner and cross of St. George at her peak," when Pilgrim arrives, but soon departs California on an 8-10 month voyage.

Boston, MA

Headquarters of the Bryant, Sturgis & Co., which owns most of the ships dealing in hides, tallow, and horn along the coast of Upper California, Boston is also home to most of the crews. Author Richard Henry Dana, Jr., signs on the brig Pilgrim after taking a

leave of absence from nearby Harvard College. He returns aboard the brig Alert, the Company having arranged the transfer to prevent his falling behind in his studies. Dana describes the reactions of the crew as the sights and sounds of Boston reach them, during a frustrating last night at anchor in the bay. Vessels large and small, sailed and steam-driven, fill the waterways. The crew is too happy to eat or sleep, but Dana finds himself apathetic, looking back nostalgically at what he has experienced. The next morning's labor, making ready for coming to the wharves, helps dispel this. Customs officers, agents, merchants, friends, loafers, and boardinghouse runners all stream aboard. Alert is made fast and the crew dismissed as Boston's bells ring out.

The California

A substantial, wall-sided, kettle-bottomed ship of the latest fashion, owned, like Pilgrim and Alert, by Bryant, Sturgis & Co., California has been collecting hides for two years when the brig Pilgrim arrives in Upper California and is ordered to drop off hides for her in San Diego to hasten her return to Boston. California sails before Pilgrim can rendezvous but returns to San Diego when Alert is packed to sail for Boston. California is then skippered by Capt. Arthur and carries a crew of 12-15 "remarkably musical" men who bring variety to the songs that Alert's crew sings while "steeving" hides, emptying their own hold into Alert's.

Cape Horn

The southern tip of South America, Cape Horn is one of the most treacherous waterways on earth. On her outbound voyage to Upper California from Boston, MA, the brig Pilgrim, carrying author Richard Henry Dana, Jr., reaches Cape Horn on 5 Nov., having sighted the Magellan Cloud and Southern Cross overhead. Light winds turn into a gale of sleet and hail. The sails have to be furled for safety, and still heavy seas wash the deck. This gives way to dense fog and calm, then back to days of violent storms before entering Pacific waters.

Dana returns from California to Boston aboard the larger brig Alert, which is badly overloaded and sails low in the water and sluggishly. She has a difficult time passing the Cape, attempting to pass through Terra del Fuego but being rebuffed by strong headwinds. The captain briefly considers heading to the Cape of Good Hope at the tip of Africa, but presses on. Beautiful but deadly ice flows endanger the ship, and winds alternate between dead calm and gale-force.

The Fazio

A small Mexican brig broken up in a storm before Pilgrim reaches Upper California, Fazio is examined at San Pedro by other ships' carpenters, deemed repairable, re-floated, and returned to service collecting hides up and down the coast. Her multi-ethnic crew joins the hide curers at San Diego. When she sails for San Blas and Mazatlán,

Fazio ignores government orders to halt and pay duties, a Kanaka (Hawaiian) being sent swimming after her for nearly a mile.

Juan Fernández Islands

The brig Pilgrim's first opportunity to drop anchor in 103 days after leaving Boston, MA, the Juan Fernández Islands are located 300 miles west of Valparaíso, Chile, in the Pacific Ocean. Author Richard Henry Dana, Jr. links them with Daniel Defoe's novel, Robinson Crusoe, where the real-life inspiration for the character spent several years. This gives him a fond association that balances the meagerness of the Chilean settlement being built by convict labor and filled with "loafers." The town is set against high, wooded mountains inland. Convicts exiled from Valparaiso perform manual labor.

Kanakas

The Sandwich Islander (Polynesian / Hawaiian) name for human being, "Kanaka" is used by whites all over the Pacific to designate Natives collectively and to address them as individuals, their proper names being too difficult to pronounce or remember. Some are called after the ship they are aboard, others by Western proper names, and others by fanciful names.

While working closely in San Diego, CA, for four months with four Kanakas, author Richard Henry Dana, Jr. takes pains to become familiar with their language, habits, and characters. Kanakas have no books, although many learn to read and write from missionaries at home. Few speak much English, but a mixed language suffices for communication. Dana trusts these people implicitly and believes that no people on earth have progressed faster from barbarism to civilization. They are far more trustworthy and generous than Americans, sharing everything in common. Kanakas smoke a great deal, but always communally. They sing in a low, guttural, monotonous chant, making up the words as they go, ridiculing and mimicking those around them.

The Lagoda

A small brig out of Boston, MA, Lagoda is in Monterey, CA, when the brig Pilgrim arrives, having ridden out a storm that destroys a Mexican brig and kills all but one member of its crew. Although rusty and worn-looking, Lagoda can carry some 31,000-32,000 hides, a task that takes over two years. When Pilgrim sails into San Diego harbor, she collides with Lagoda, but causes little damage. Lagoda's Capt. Bradshaw humiliates Pilgrim's Capt. Thompson over the incident. The forecastle on Lagoda is broader, lighter, and cheerier than Pilgrim's dark accommodations for her discontented crew. They expect to sail to Boston in several weeks.

The Loriotte

A short, clumsy, hermaphrodite brig plying the waters of Upper California in 1835, at the same time as the brig Pilgrim, Loriotte flies Genoese colors, is skippered by Capt. Nye of Oahu, and is largely crewed by Sandwich Islanders (Hawaiians) serving under English boatswains. She is in San Pedro briefly as Pilgrim sets up operations; they meet again in San Diego, when Pilgrim drifts into Loriotte after colliding with Lagoda. Loriotte preys on illegal cargoes deposited on uninhabited islands by Avon to avoid Mexican duties.

Monterey, CA

The capital of Mexican Upper California, Monterey features the only custom house along the coast in 1834/35, making it mandatory for all trading vessels to land there first. Point Pinos stands at the southern headlands of broad Monterey Bay; Año Nuevo marks the north. The 18-mile cove is surrounded by rich woodlands, surprising for vessels like the brig Pilgrim that arrive from the arid south. It is safe from destructive southeast winds. The town of whitewashed adobe houses is prettier than Santa Barbara but is laid out at random without streets or fences. It is the first town in California that Pilgrim's crew believes is "Christian" (i.e., civilized) and has all the resources of water, climate, soil, and forests to become a great center. Monterey is built around the open-plaza presidio. The Governor-General, appointed from Mexico City, is the chief civil and military officer. The houses are one-story adobe with earthen floors and unglazed windows. The doors are seldom shut. Ships deposit illegal cargoes on uninhabited islands before submitting to inspection and levies and later slip out to replenish stock while trading.

San Diego, CA

The southernmost settlement in Mexican Upper California, San Diego has a large, secluded bay. Bryant, Sturgis & Co. and other trading companies maintain storage facilities there to collect hides gathered up and down the coast. The brig Pilgrim first sails there after Capt. Thompson's brutal flogging of two sailors and a near-mutiny. The land is low, green, and treeless. The harbor entrance is narrow and its currents swift. There is a fine white sand beach from which the town cannot be seen, but four large, wooden "hide houses" are prominent. Pilgrim collides with Lagoda, causing little damage, and then drifts into Loriotte before making safe berth.

On Sunday, half of Pilgrim's crew is given liberty in a town half the size of Monterey and Santa Barbara and possessing little or no business. The presidio is in ruins, manned by a useless garrison, but the mission, built of adobe and plastered, is striking. It is built around a square, with the church occupying one side. Indians live in crude huts around it. None of the Gray Friars (Franciscans) stop to talk to author Richard Henry Dana, Jr., on his first visit with shipmate Ben Stimson, but the mayordomo (steward) feeds them a

rich Mexican meal and refuses payment, for God's sake. He accepts, however, a gratuity.

Pilgrim's crew transfers the 3,500 raw hides ashore for curing and storage in the 40,000-hide capacity storage unit. Dana is left behind with three white crewmen, and four hired Kanakas (Hawaiians) to handle the curing operation while Pilgrim resumes ranging the coast to fulfill her quota of hides. Dana is sorrier to leave San Diego than any other port when he returns to Boston.

Returning as a tourist in 1859, Dana finds San Diego, still a small Mexican town, is guarded by a lighthouse at Point Loma. Nothing marks the old hides operation or the Kanakas' oven. Dana wonders why he cares about their fates.

San Francisco, CA

The northernmost settlement in Mexican Upper California, San Francisco sits on a magnificent bay discovered by Sir Francis Drake. A legendary Mr. Richardson builds the first wooden structure, which he replaces the next year by an adobe building. Around the bay are bights and rivers that lead to such trading stations as San José and Santa Clara. Indian crews bring hundreds of hides down in open boats and sailors are assigned to accompany trading goods up river on long, unpleasant trips.

Offshore of San Francisco is an excellent source of firewood and fresh water: Wood Island/Isla de los Angeles. Author Richard Henry Dana, Jr., is on a gathering expedition when a northeaster catches the skiff exposed, subjecting the men to two miserable nights of cold, discomfort, and fear. Russian ships from Sitka come to winter in San Francisco. Dana predicts that if California has a bright future it will be centered on San Francisco.

Returning as a tourist in 1859, Dana finds a town of 150,000, well-organized and civilized. It owes its "soberness, morality, and good government" to the Vigilance Committee, which makes short shrift of all "ruffianism."

San Juan, CA

To author Richard Henry Dana, Jr.'s mind, San Juan is the only "romantic" spot on the coast of Upper California. San Juan sits on high tableland rising on vertical cliffs 400-500 feet from the crashing Pacific. The grandeur is refreshing. Boat crews reach the top by circuitous routes that only a human or a monkey could negotiate. Indians bring cartloads of hides from around the mission of San Juan Capistrano to the edge for the sailors to sail off the cliffs and collect below for transshipment to the brigs. Half a dozen inevitably get caught on ledges and Dana is foolhardy risking his life, clambering down a rope to retrieve them and put money in the captain's pocket. The same scenario is repeated before he sails back to Boston.

San Pedro / Los Angeles, CA

Located between Santa Barbara and San Diego in Upper California, San Pedro, universally called the "Hell of California" is the desolate seaport serving the Pueblo de los Angeles and several rich missions, 30 miles inland. Los Angeles is the largest city in the region, located in the midst of immense cattle ranches.

Each company engaged in the trade of hides keeps a collection depot at San Pedro, whence it transfers them to ships' holds. The hides are brought by ox cart from Los Angeles, but transportation stops atop a steep 30-40-foot hill, which is invisible From the sea. When the local Indians decline to be employed carrying hides, the sailors resort to throwing the hides down and retrieving them, without getting them wet. The crew of the brig Pilgrim takes ashore 40-50 tons of goods and takes on 2,000 hides over several days before a Southeaster forces them out to sea. Dana describes this as the hardest and most disagreeable work yet on the voyage. During a second visit to San Pedro, the crew of Pilgrim and other brigs repair a Mexican vessel that a storm has smashed up on the beach.

Returning as a tourist in 1859, Dana finds that San Pedro has none of the inconveniences that he had hated. Only the cliff remains. The population has doubled. Dana takes the stage daily to the Pueblo, which has become a flourishing town of 20,000.

Santa Barbara, CA

The brig Pilgrim's first stop in its trading expedition to Upper California in 1834/35, Santa Barbara is the central port on the coast. Its large crescent-shaped bay (or "canal") of white sand stretches from Point Conception to Point Santa Buenaventura. Three large islands stand opposite the beach some 20 miles to sea. Santa Barbara is little more than an open, shallow road stead with so heavy a surf that during the southeaster season, that is, between the months of November and April, visiting ships must hurry to deep water for safety.

The small, unpainted adobe town stands within an amphitheater of mountains near the old mission and presidio. It makes a bad impression on author Richard Henry Dana, Jr. There have been no trees since a fire a dozen years earlier. Watching Sandwich Islanders' technique teaches Pilgrim's landing party how to deal with pounding surf. Bullock skins, tallow, and horns are brought down from inland and ferried out to the brigs Pilgrim, Ayacucho, and Loriotte.

Dana returns to Santa Barbara months later aboard Alert and finds the locals welcoming. In Santa Barbara, the boat crew attends a fandango (wedding reception) for Agent Robinson and the daughter of the local grandee, Doña Anita de la Guerra de Noriego y Corillo. Returning as a tourist in 1859, Dana finds Santa Barbara a prosperous Yankee port town but still appears a "lifeless Mexican town."

Wilmington and Liverpool Packet

A "spouter" (whaler), Wilmington and Liverpool Packet is in Santa Barbara, CA, after a 6-8-month voyage, harvesting 1,900 barrels of oil from the "offshore ground." Author Richard Henry Dana, Jr. calls both the vessel and her 30-man crew slovenly, oily, and smelly. Most are "raw hands" with hayseed still in their hair. In a footnote for the second edition, Dana responds to hurt feelings among whalers but refuses to admit exaggeration in his portrayal. He admits that the nature of the trade probably precludes the standards of cleanliness to which he is accustomed on other commercial vehicles. Most sailors seem to share this attitude towards whalers.

Themes

Hierarchy

Much of Two Years before the Mast consists of Richard Henry Dana, Jr.'s observations about the nature of society, both aboard ship and on land in still-desolate California in the 1830s. With the mind of a lawyer-in-training, Dana accepts the unwritten law of the sea, which makes the captain of a vessel, commercial as well as naval, the absolute monarch, the only person whose word matters. In one telling episode, when a particularly cruel skipper reduces a sailor to calling out to Jesus Christ while being flogged, the captain declares that there is no savior aboard except himself. In the normal course of affairs, the captain gives general orders to the mate, the only other true officer aboard, who translates these into specific tasks and orders at his own discretion. In the captain's absence, the mate has full charge of the vessel. Both must be addressed as Mister. The second and third mates are petty officers, executing their superiors' commands. The men "before the mast," who have no right to go to the rear of the vessel without summons or to take a turn at the helm, sign a contract specifying that their primary duty is to obey orders promptly and fully. Punishment for failing to do so can be brutal, but slow-downs in performance is a weapon the sailors can—and do—employ as a means of protest.

On shore, crew discipline is less less intense. There Dana has time to observe the equally-hierarchical organization of Mexican society. Catholic missionaries found the original missions, followed by secular rulers who build the presidios. The Natives have been Christianized and turned into virtual serfs, bound to the land. There is a thin aristocratic veneer. Dana observes that Mexicans and Indians are both extremely lazy, replying "¿Quien sabe?" (who knows) to every question. Natives from the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii), depicted as clever and quick-learning, provide semi-skilled labor, but always under command of whites. Blacks serve as cooks and stewards but seem not to be treated as subhuman, as is often the case in the Eastern states, as a means of justifying slavery. Women belong to their fathers and husbands, and protecting their virtue is a major concern.

Religion

Religion flows through most of Two Years before the Mast as an uncomfortable current below the surface. Only in the concluding essay, "Twenty-Four Years After," does author Richard Henry Dana, reveal the depth of his own belief and cast light on some of his running commentaries. Dana inserts frequent allusions to personages and events in the Judeo-Christian scriptures along with snippets of familiar passages. Never does he rise to the level of preaching on any subject, so these are left to the reader to identify or pass over.

True to the tradition of seafaring, Sundays are observed by a cessation of normal work routines. It is up to the captain of a given vessel whether any formal religious observances take place. When George Ballmer is lost overboard, he is given no formal funeral, but shipmates, who are all believers after their own fashion, hope that their suffering on the sea will counterbalance everything else at the last judgment. A Bible-reading sailor reminds the rest that they could perish just as quickly, with no time for repentance. Aboard the two brigs on which Dana sails, captain and crew are all "swearing" men, so there are no services. The men are happy to have time free to mend their clothes and share yarns. In bad weather and busy economic times, the privilege of Sunday rest is withdrawn. Dana notes that although the ports do not function on Sundays, many captains schedule arrivals and departures on the Lord's Day for their own convenience.

Mexico, of which California is a still a part, is a Roman Catholic land. Americans and Britons wishing to settle there must convert and most marry locals. Dana shows little Yankee prejudice against "papism," but observes that it will never thrive in New England because of the many feast days that are observed as days of rest. He and his shipmates seem to envy sailors aboard the French and Italian vessels they encounter in ports. He notes that Catholic ships are often draped in black on Good Friday and on some an effigy of Judas Iscariot is keel-hauled and hung from a yardarm.

Dana makes a point of visiting the missions, attending mass and vespers when available but otherwise sightseeing and talking with clergy and lay employees. The steward of an impoverished mission accepts no payment for giving him a meal as a gift from God. Impressed, Dana gives a freewill offering. Dana is critical of how the Christianized Indians have been turned into serfs and given few provisions or education. He admires workers brought over from Hawaii, remarks that the Protestant missionaries are busy among them, and intimates without polemic that their own customs and beliefs are under attack.

In the concluding essay, Dana reveals himself as an ecumenist long before that becomes fashionable. He makes the rounds of San Francisco's many churches and approves of how being out West has cured an old deacon of his stodgy ways.

Nature

Richard Henry Dana, Jr., is a keen observer of nature and Two Years before the Mast is filled with passages extolling its beauty and grandeur. Perhaps the most poetic are his descriptions of great islands of ice off the tip of Tierra del Fuego, at the southern tip of South America. Dana declares that no artist can do them justice before painting a word picture of the snow swirling off their flat tops, icebergs calving into the ocean, and the deep colors at their base. He evokes the sight and sounds of herds of whales sounding around the ships on which he sails and dolphins playing in the bow waves. An albatross sleeping on a placid surface before rising on long wings is particularly evocative.

In his first contemplation of a night at sea, where he quotes William Cullen Bryant's "Thanatopsis": "Old Ocean's gray and melancholy waste," defines Dana's true attitude towards Nature. He argues against those who laud sunrise at sea as more majestic than that on land, saying that it is wanting in the sounds of Nature and civilization awakening, particularly bird song. Throughout the book, Dana looks to the utility of Nature for enterprise's sake and, above all, to the power inherent in Nature to help or thwart the commercial person's work. Rolling surf is beautiful but requires that humans learn to harmonize with its forces both to land on the beach safely and to leave again. San Diego Bay is objectively a beautiful place but all the more pleasant because it shelters ships from the fierce southwesterly winds that force crews to hurry out to the safety of deep water to avoid potential danger close in at anchor.

Catching the Gulf Stream or trade winds can propel a vessel a thousand miles in days—something utterly unheard of on land, but fierce winds blowing up from a clear sky can rip sails to shreds and threaten to snap off beams and even mighty masts. Often they are becalmed or even driven back by headwinds. Officers and sailors learn to read the signs and must react instantly in order to exploit advantages and avert disaster. Particularly in the southern waters they know that their tiny cork of a brig could be sent to the bottom in an instant, claiming all hands' lives. Nature is above all an ever-changing Power. In the face of it, Dana stands in awe, far more than in the face of pristine beauty.

Style

Perspective

Richard Henry Dana, Jr., interrupts his career as a Harvard undergraduate to become a common sailor in the Merchant Marine. Reading has damaged his eyesight. Throughout the book it is clear that he values his education and intends to return to it and worries that the prospect of more than two years "before the mast" (i.e., serving as a sailor), will doom him to a career on the water.

By the time Dana in 1841 gets around to writing up his memories of 1835-36, he has completed Harvard and become a lawyer. According to Wright Morris' Afterword, Dana's initial intent in writing Two Years before the Mast had been to expose the widespread cruelty that he and his shipmates endured, but he avoids the polemical track to create a pioneering volume about life at sea that allows readers to experience it vicariously in all of its elements. He does not gloss over cruelty, but puts it in context, balancing rights in a lawyer's fashion, but also making clear where he stands and how he feels about events.

Two Years before the Mast is very much the story of a young person challenging himself, opening up to the world, embracing good and bad, and sharing it all with the reader whom he treats as an intimate friend. He writes fluidly in the sailor's jargon, only occasionally explaining terms that landlubbers will not understand. Much of the charm of the book is not understanding the unfamiliar nouns and verbs he brandies. He repeats the basic actions of sailing a brig that one intuits what is happening and feels inclined to join in holding on even with one's eyelashes. Dana explains some things, but if he were to explain everything, the books would be pedantically dead.

Instead, it is alive with fond memories. Whether Dana would recommend that anyone sign on for a cruise as he did is unclear. The appended essay, "Twenty-Four Years After," makes clear that Dana at age forty regrets the loss of the past and sees technology encroaching on romance. Herman Melville had gone to sea after reading his first edition, but steamships are making it increasingly unlikely that many more will take up life under the sails. Even if they do, the hide trade in California is gone. Perhaps Dana simply needs to leave a verbal snapshot of what he has seen and done.

Tone

According to Wright Morris' Afterword, Richard Henry Dana's initial intent in writing Two Years before the Mast had been to expose the widespread cruelty practiced in the Merchant Marines. Dana writes from the perspective of 1841, when he is already a lawyer, about events in 1835-36, when he is a young academic who has committed himself to two years of adventure. From the time he first conquers seasickness two days out of Boston until he returns a veteran of the seas, Dana is swallowed up in the

day-to-day drudgery that somehow translates into pride in his personal accomplishments and functioning as part of an elite team. The book is entirely subjective in that it depicts only one person's direct experience, but Dana also talks about his shipmates—and quotes them to let their own voices emerge—and the general attitudes of sailors everywhere.

Writing as a lawyer, Dana is careful to state where the parties to shipboard disputes stand vis-a-vis the traditional law of the sea—even when he personally favors the other side. He deplores the flogging of two men but admits that the captain is within his rights. He records, however, the captain's own declaration that his primary motivation is sadism. Dana writes with a lawyer's care and a poet's spirit about all he sees, hears, tastes, and does. He grumbles about terrible duty but performs it diligently. The bittersweet essay, "Twenty-Four Years After," which concludes the book concentrates the varying emotions that pull Dana around during the body of the book, and he meets several people about whom he writes in the first edition. His anxiety about people having taken offense at his depictions shows how dedicated he is in telling his story candidly but without polemics.

Had Dana penned an exposé, it is unlikely that it would be so powerful or influential a work. When young men like Herman Melville ship out having read Dana, they know what to expect at sea and the modern reader can feel, hear, taste, and see what 19th-century sailors endured.

Structure

The Signet Classic edition of Two Years before the Mast by Richard Henry Dana, Jr., consists of the author's brief Preface to the 1869 edition, thirty-six chapters of text, numbered but not titled, a post-script entitled "Twenty-Four Years After," four pages of illustrations of how sailing are rigged, and an Afterword by Wright Morris. Running titles at the head of recto pages serve in lieu of chapter titles, helping the reader navigate. Some chapters include several successive running titles. The organization of the book is strictly chronological, with some flashbacks to provide information on major figures. The story unfolds naturally and clearly. There is no formal structure above the chapter level, although the work falls naturally into three parts.

The first section plucks Dana at age nineteen out of the world of academics, which has ruined his eyes, and signs him aboard the merchant brig Pilgrim as a common sailor for a two-year voyage to the west coast of North America and back. Dana writes as an experienced salt about how he years earlier toughens up, gets his sea legs, and could have gone on to be a professional man of the sea. Morris' Afterword specifies that Dana's initial intent had been to expose the cruelty practiced in the Merchant Marine, but such critique is swallowed up in his own wonder at how he grows adept at living and working at sea. The first part ends with the Pilgrim's arrival in California and the captain's brutal flogging of two seamen, largely because this particular captain is a sadist.

The second section shows Pilgrim and other commercial vessels ranging up and down the coast from San Diego to San Francisco, collecting uncured bullock hides, processing them on the beach, and packing the larger brig Alert for transshipment back to Boston. Dana is traded to this crew during the collection process and spends much of the time ashore. He lauds his new skipper and mate, contrasting their methods with the less successful ones aboard Pilgrim. The toil ashore quickly makes him long to sail again.

Part 3 shows Alert, with Dana a permanent part of the crew, sailing through the southern Pacific, fighting its way around the dangerous Cape Horn at the tip of South America, and cleaning up to return to Boston in ship shape. Dana by this point is an experienced hand, able to comment with authority about what he and his shipmates are experiencing.

The essay, "Twenty-Four Years After," brings Dana back to the scene of his youthful adventures as San Francisco flourishes in the Gold Rush, but the southern parts of California continue to languish under Mexican rule. The added words come in response to requests from readers, who find his book virtually the sole source of information about California. It is a bittersweet tour, causing him to live more in the past than in the unfamiliar present. Wherever he has been able to ascertain the fates of shipmates and vessels, Dana ties off loose ends for his readers' sakes.

Quotes

"The change from the tight frock-coat, silk cap, and kid gloves of an undergraduate at Harvard, to the loose duck trousers, checked shirt, and tarpaulin hat of a sailor, though somewhat of a transformation, was soon made; and I supposed that I should pass very well for a Jack tar. But it is impossible to deceive the practiced eye in these matters; and while I thought myself to be looking as salt as Neptune himself, I was, no doubt, known for a landsman by every one on board as soon as I hove in sight. A sailor has a peculiar cut to his clothes, and a way of wearing them which a green hand can never get." Chapter 1, pg. 9.

"Monday, November 17th. This was a black day in our calendar. At seven o'clock in the morning, it being our watch below, we were aroused from a sound sleep by the cry of 'All hands ahoy! a man overboard!'" Chapter 6, pg. 38.

"The next day being Sunday, which is the liberty-day among merchantmen, when it is usual to let a part of the crew go ashore, the sailors had depended upon a holiday, and were already disputing who should ask to go, when, upon being called in the morning, we were turned-to upon the rigging, and found that the top-mast, which had been sprung, was to come down, and a new one to go up, with top-gallant and royal masts, and the rigging to be set. This was too bad. If there is anything that irritates sailors, and makes them feel hardly used, it is being deprived of their Sunday. Not that they would always, or indeed generally, spend it improvingly, but it is their only day of rest. " Chapter 12, pg. 72.

"This was bad enough for the crew; but still worse was it for me, who did not mean to be a sailor for life, having intended only to be gone eighteen months or two years. Three or four years might make me a sailor in every respect, mind and habits, as well as body, nolens volens, and would put all my companions so far ahead of me that a college degree and a profession would be in vain to think of; and I made up my mind that, feel as I might, a sailor I might have to be, and to command a merchant vessel might be the limit of my ambition." Chapter 14, pg. 89.

"However, it was kind of him, and an attention from a captain is a thing not to be slighted. Thompson's majesty could not have bent to it, in the sight of so many mates and men; but Faucon was a man of education, literary habits, ad good social position, ad held things at their right value." Chapter 20, pg. 156.

"A sailor can tell, by the sound, what sail is coming in; and, in a short time, we heard the top-gallant sails come in, one after another, and then the flying jib. This seemed to ease her a good deal, and we were fast going off to the land of Nod, when, bang, bang, bang on the scuttle, and 'All hands, reef topsails, ahoy!' started us out of our berths." Chapter 25, pg. 204.

"I went forward with a light heart, but feeling as much anger and contempt as I could well contain between my teeth. English Ben was sent aft, and in a few moments came

forward, looking as though he had received his sentence to be hanged. The captain had told him to get his things ready to go on board the brig the next morning; and that I would give him thirty dollars and a suit of clothes." Chapter 29, pg. 253.

"And there lay, floating in the ocean, several miles off, an immense, irregular mass, its top and points covered with snow, and its center of a deep indigo color. This was an iceberg, and of the largest size, as one of our men said who had been in the Northern Ocean. As far as the eye could reach, the sea in every direction was of a deep-blue color, the waves running high and fresh, and sparkling in the light, and in the midst lay this immense mountain island, its cavities and valleys throw into deep shade, and its points and pinnacles glittering in the sun." Chapter 31, pg. 283.

"Our merchant ships are always undermanned, and if one man is lost by sickness, they cannot spare another to take care of him. A sailor is always presumed to be well, and if he's sick he's a poor dog. One has to stand his wheel, and another his lookout, and the sooner he gets on deck again the better." Chapter 31, pg. 293.

"However, 'a miss is as good as a mile'; a saying which sailors very often have occasion to use. An escape is always a joke on board ship. A man would be ridiculed who should make a serious matter of it. A sailor knows too well that his life hangs upon a thread to wish to be often reminded of it." Chapter 34, pg. 317.

"The city bells were just ringing one when the last turn was made fast and the crew dismissed; and in five minutes more not a soul was left on board the good ship Alert but the old shipkeeper, who had come down from the countinghouse to take charge of her." Chapter 36, pg. 341.

"As the shores of California faded in the distance, and the summits of the Coast Range sank under the blue horizon, I bade farewell—yes, I do not doubt, forever—to those scenes which, however changed or unchanged, must always possess an ineffable interest for me." Twenty-Four Years After, pg. 362.

Topics for Discussion

How does life aboard the Alert compare with life on the Pilgrim? What factor(s) most account for the difference?

Which character(s) most impress Richard Henry Dana, Jr., and in what ways do they influence his development as a sailor and thinking human being?

How does Richard Henry Dana, Jr.'s legal training show in the novel?

How does Richard Henry Dana, Jr. reveal and conceal his religious beliefs in the first edition of this book? To what extent are the revelations in the later addendum expected or surprising?

What is Richard Henry Dana, Jr.'s bottom-line evaluation of Mexican society in Upper California in 1835/36? Describe the various castes as he describes them.

Richard Henry Dana, Jr.'s shipmates find his climbing down the cliffs to retrieve hides foolish. Why do you think he does it and includes narration of two separate climbing events? What purpose do they serve in the novel?

What purpose does the revelations about the floggings aboard Pilgrim serve in the structure of the book?

How does Richard Henry Dana, Jr.'s mood of nostalgia affect the ending of the first edition?