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### PATIENCE

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## PATIENCE.

BY L. G. CARR LAUGHTON.

THE difficulty of the nautical passages in this poem, which Mr. Callender recognises ("M. M.," IV., 97, *sqq.*), is very significant. It is a difficulty not peculiar to this poem alone, but one which is, in a greater or less degree, common to all the nautical descriptions which we have in old or middle English, and indeed in contemporary French, and no doubt in other languages as well. In all such passages numerous words and phrases occur which are either incomprehensible, or the interpretation whereof is at best exceedingly doubtful. There is an ever-present temptation to treat such obscurities as a sort of mental jig-saw puzzle, the solution of which is an exhilarating exercise, in which every guess is permissible. This method admits of the display of much ingenuity, but it has the cardinal defect that it is not convincing; that every explanation reached by it, however plausible it may seem, is *ipso facto* suspect.

There is, it seems to me, nothing more certain than this: that if the Society for Nautical Research is fully to justify its name, it is incumbent upon it to do its best to trace the history of the language of the sea to a much earlier date than has hitherto been done. At present our knowledge of sea words and phrases goes back roughly to the beginning of the Tudor period. There are, of course, some Tudor, especially early Tudor, words which are still obscure; but broadly it may be stated that we know enough of the sea language of that era to be able to take up even the most technical document with a reasonable hope of understanding it. But all that comes before the accession of Henry VII. is at present obscure. There is, so to speak, a heavy, low-lying fog, over which we can from the mast head see some few known things even at a great distance, but through which even those nearest to us loom faint and uncertain, while those moderately far off are completely shrouded.

Why should this be? It is, I think, due to more causes than one, some of which may be glanced at.

(1). It is singularly unfortunate for our purpose that Henry VI.'s long reign fell when it did, and that the wars of York

and Lancaster diverted so much of the energies of the nation. The greater part of the fifteenth century was from these causes a period of naval stagnation, as was well understood at the time and denounced by the author of the "Libel of English Policie." It is thus not remarkable that documents of nautical interest surviving from the 15th century are few in number. There is a great gap between the reigns of Henry IV. and Henry VII., towards bridging which little or no effort has as yet been made.

(2). Even the most casual comparison of the naval inventories of Henry IV.'s reign ("M. M.," IV., 20, *sqq.*) with those of Henry VII. ("N. R. S.," Vol. VII.) will show how extreme was the development between 1412 and 1485. No official documentary evidence for any years of this transition period has as yet been published, though some few lists and inventories exist. Writer after writer has been content to fill in this vast blank by a reproduction—generally faulty—from the Rous roll, and by a reference to the song about the pilgrims. And the Rous roll, belonging as it does to nearly the end of this period, shows us rather what had been achieved than the intermediate steps by which this comparatively high degree of nautical development had been reached.

(3). At the same time the English language was developing nearly as rapidly as the naval art. It is a coincidence, which perhaps admits of explanation, that the ship and the English language should, so to speak, have become standardised at the same time. But we may suppose that, if Henry VI. had been another Edward III., the broadside sailing ship would have anticipated the printing press by something like half-a-century.

To whichever of these considerations the greatest weight is to be ascribed, it is at least clear why in jumping back to the 14th century we find ourselves in a nautical world which is entirely new and strange. Not only was the material development of shipping during the one century 1400-1500 greater than that of the three centuries between 1500-1800, but the development of phraseology was equally rapid. And we are almost entirely without knowledge of the intermediate stages.

It would appear, therefore, that to explain satisfactorily the technicalities of the middle 14th century, of "PATIENCE" for instance, one of two courses must be adopted. Either we must project ourselves violently back into that almost unknown region, and do the best we can by a laborious comparison of the terms used, and of their variant forms, in other documents of

approximately the same date ; or else we must work slowly back, beginning at the earliest date at which we feel ourselves on reasonably sure ground, and so proceeding step by step chronologically till we finally reach the date at which evidence fails. That date is certainly much earlier than the date of "PATIENCE" ; how early it is likely to prove to be cannot yet be said, but the universal principle of "the higher the fewer" will undoubtedly have its influence. There is, however, some consolation in knowing beyond the point at which English records fail, the story may be carried on backwards by the help of the Norman metrical romances of the 12th and 13th centuries, and of the Sagas, between which and the Anglo-Saxon glossaries of the 10th century there is no gap likely to prove altogether unsurmountable. When we consider that we have at present no *systematic* knowledge of the development of the nautical art for a period of much more than 400 years, it will perhaps be admitted that there is something exhilarating in the thought that, by united effort, and by the exercise of a modicum of Patience, we may eventually be able to have a continuous history covering at least 1,000 years. Of course even then we would not be satisfied, and would wish to dip still further into the past. Even that might be possible, though hardly from home-grown evidence. But that, it may be thought, is another story, the telling of which may safely be postponed while we concentrate our attention on more recent times.

In working backwards the first step, for reasons already stated, is likely to prove the most difficult. But when we have before us the inventories of 1420 and 1435, or thereabouts, which are at the P.R.O. awaiting transcription and publication, we are likely to find that the valuable lists of Henry IV.'s reign, which Mr. Moore is editing in *THE MARINER'S MIRROR*, will prove to contain fewer riddles than they seem to do at present. It is also to be hoped that if any member of the Society should know of any document likely to help in the enquiry, and intermediate between 1435 and 1485, he will call attention to it. It would also help if all the ships in the Rous roll were reproduced with understanding. Photographs alone would not do justice to them, as some details, especially the rigging, being faintly delineated in pencil, would be lost. The ideal would be photographs side by side with line drawings of the same subjects.

We cannot now, it will be agreed, hope to explain "PATIENCE" by the retrograde method. We can, however, do some little towards elucidating it by means of a comparison with other

documents of the same date, and of somewhat earlier and later dates. For this purpose the inventory of the "galley *La Philipe*" of 1336, printed by Nicolas at II., 469 of his History of the Royal Navy, is probably the most important. It at least gives us a fair idea of the simplicity of the rig of the great ship of that period, though it does not enlighten us as to the hull. Some of the evidence collected by Jal ("Arch. Nav." *Mémoires* 3, 7, 8 and 9) will also help; and the Henry IV. lists may also do so, though it so happens that Mr. Moore's first instalment does not seem to illustrate any of the difficulties involved. No doubt there are also other written sources which do not occur to me at the moment, but I am not attempting to make a complete list, being rather a votary of the backward or retrograde method of enquiry.

As to the passages in "PATIENCE" there is, it seems to me, an additional difficulty in the fact that we do not rightly know when the poet is using legitimate technicalities and when he is indulging in poetic paraphrase or generality. I rather suspect that the latter is frequently the case. Quite probably the author was a monk, who perhaps had sailed on a pilgrimage to St. James, or gained a smattering of nautical knowledge in some such way. It is at any rate most improbable that he can have been a seaman; and for our purpose it would have been vastly preferable if, let us say, Chaucer's shipman had undertaken to spin the yarn of Jonah and the whale, and if we had a sure record of exactly what he said. As we have not, we must be thankful for what we have got.

In offering some comment on the eight line passage (lines 101-8 of the poem) reproduced by Mr. Callender at p. 100 above, I will for convenience use the same reference numbers as Mr. Callender.

(1.) "Then he tron on þo tres." That the meaning is "he went aboard" seems undoubted, but it is not clear that *tres* is necessarily a *technical* phrase for the deck. "Tree," with a corresponding adjective "treen," was generally used where we should say "timber" till about the end of the 16th century; so it may be that the poet was as far from being technically correct in speaking of the deck as "tres," as a 17th century author would have been in calling it "those timbers." At any rate no corresponding usage of "tres" has yet been adduced. Note also that in l. 190 of this poem when Jonah is dragged on deck he is said to be "set upon board."

(2.) "And þay her tramme ruchen." That the general sense is that "they got ready her gear" is clear enough. It is,

however, perhaps worth noticing that certainly in Henry VII. s time (N.R.S. Inventories, *e.g.*, 188, 189) the corresponding phrase "takle" was used of the yard and sail together. Thus we have listed certain ropes as belonging "to the main takle." If therefore "tramme" was used here as an equivalent for the 15th century "takle," which is far from certain, it would refer not to the gear of the ship in general, but to that of the yard and sail alone, *i.e.*, to the running rigging.

(3) "Cachen vp þe crossayl." I do not see the need for the difficulties which Mr. Callender raises. We have at present no record of any sail other than square in any English ship of the 14th century; and we know that square-sails were commonly called cross-sails in the Tudor period, though that was no doubt in part at least to distinguish them from fore and aft sails, *i.e.*, from mizzens. Also we know that to this day people with a smattering of nautical knowledge often call square yards cross-yards. Altogether it seems to me that a monk, especially when he was an alliterative poet, and on the look out for a word beginning with c—, would naturally call the sail the cross-sail. When you hoist a sail the yard goes with it, so that, *au pied de la lettre*, "crossayl" here means the yard and the sail.

Why they should hoist the yard before loosing the sail is another matter, but that they did so seems clear from the confirmatory evidence of the "Song of the Pilgrims." We do not know enough of mediæval seamanship to be certain, but probably in harbour ships rode with their yards lowered a long way down the mast. If, therefore, they didn't want a raffle of canvas smothering everything on deck, they would naturally hoist the yard somewhat before they loosed the sail. How far they hoisted it would depend on whether a bonnet was bent or not. I do not know if sails were commonly furled with bonnets on.

I may be allowed here to follow Mr. Callender in the digression in which he mentions the "wartake," and to suggest that his explanation of that term is certainly wrong. It occurs freely in the early inventories, and was undoubtedly a preventer tack of some sort. How it was fitted and used is not yet known, and the derivation of the first syllable "war—" is undecided, though probably Teutonic. That, however, is a point for separate discussion.

(4.) "Cables pay fasten." Again I see no difficulty. I take it the meaning is that they "brought to" the cables, an indispensable preliminary to weighing the anchors. By the way, when was the messenger introduced? It is possible that the

mediæval "winding rope" was a messenger; if not, such a thing did not yet exist. But whether it did or not it would probably be beneath the notice of the monk-poet.

Of course, cables were used, as the lists show [*e.g.*, Henry VII., "Inventories," 276] to make some of the large ropes of a ship, but I have noticed no case of their being used to make halliards.

(6.) "Sprude spak to þe sprete þe spare bawe-lyne." The question is what does "spare" mean? The alternatives suggested are that it is either the adjective meaning thin, or that it means "spar" in the modern sense. It might also mean "spare" in the modern sense, *i.e.*, "extra" or "duplicate."

Remember first of all that this is an alliterative poem, and that a one syllable adjective beginning with s— was wanted. Then if we consider that, although the bowline was not really a thin rope, yet it would seem so when seen hanging from the yard before the sail was set, being then in close proximity to the very thick tack and sheet, then it will not seem remarkable that the poet should call it thin, *i.e.*, "spare."

But it may be, though I do not think it likely, that we are here on the track of a discovery. The bowline, as its name shows, went originally to the bow, which, as tends to be forgotten, was the bulge of the bow, the shoulder of the ship, not the stem. Are we sure that in the 14th century bowlines always led to the bowsprit? Is it possible that one still led to either bow, and that there was an extra, or *spare* bowline leading to the bowsprit? This seems at first sight improbable; but if something of the sort was not the case, how are we to explain the entry, in the inventory of *La Philipe* (1336), of *one* bowline? There is a modern touch about that single main bowline.

If "spare" means "spar" I do not see how it could refer either to the mast, which was not a spar, nor to the yard, with which it had nothing to do. It would seem to be necessary to explain it as "the bowline which goes to the spar," *i.e.*, to the bowsprit, which at that early date had not grown into a mast.

In any case I cannot agree with Mr. Callender's ingenious reasoning on this passage. We have every reason to believe that the bowline had the same function as it still has (if anywhere it survives) for some hundreds of years before the date of this poem. (See Jal, "Arch. Nav." *passim*).

As to why a bowline should elsewhere be called "merry" by the poet, it seems legitimate to suggest that sailing on a wind, *i.e.*, when the bowline was hauled, is the most exhilarating of all sailing. Probably it was so even in the 14th century, and perhaps



the poet, if he had made his pilgrimage to Compostella, had had some experience of it. There seems nothing far fetched about the epithet, which may even have been familiarly used in conversation. But again, the choice of the epithet may be solely due to alliteration.

(7) "Gederen to þe gyde-ropes." My suggestion is that "gyde-ropes," *i.e.*, guide-ropes, is not a technicality at all: that the poet was ignorant of the name of much of the running rigging, and used "guide-ropes" generically for all the ropes which trim or set the sail, or, as he would say, guide it. These would be the braces and sheets; and the slack of the tacks would also have to be gathered in.

As to Mr. Callender's suggestion that "gyde-ropes" may mean gaskets, I would notice (a) that we do not know that gaskets were in use at this date. (b) That if they were we have no evidence that they were called "gyde-ropes." (c) That the early usage, continued down to the advent of foot ropes, seems to have been to furl the sail with rope yarns or old strands, which were cut. (d) That, unless we credit the poet with more intimate nautical knowledge than it seems safe to attribute to him, it is unfair to suppose that he would have known what a gasket was, even if such a thing then existed.

(8) "þe grete cloþ falles." The great cloth must be the sail, and if my explanation of (7) is the true one, the poet has simply put the cart before the horse, a thing quite allowable in his case. The dash which is placed before this phrase in the text may even be held to show that the poet meant it as a parenthesis, describing something he had forgotten. Or it may be that, even when the sail was cut loose, it did not at once fall, being partly held up by the brails, which would overhaul themselves as the sheets were hauled on.

(9) "Þay layden in on ladde-borde." I think that probably they did so because ladde-borde begins with the necessary alliterative letter. Would a one-sailed mediæval ship make sail on a wind when she had a fair wind out of harbour? I doubt it. I imagine she would have taken care to have her head the right way before she made sail.

(10) "And þe lofe wynnes." Mr. Callender sees no difficulty here, but to me this seems the most difficult passage of the whole poem. I do not know what the term "lofe" means, beyond taking for granted that it is the word which has at different times been written *lof*, *lofe*, *loof*, and *luff*. Indeed this word is one of the most obscure of all sea-words in its early his-

tory, as one or two passages will tend to show. It may be mentioned here that the article *sub voce* "Luff," in the New English Dict. does not help us, and will need considerable modification as further evidence comes to light.

One of the earliest English instances of the use of the term is in the often quoted passage in which Matthew Paris (or rather Wendover) described Hubert de Burgh's squadron as reaching out from Dover to get to windward of Eustace the Monk on 24 Aug., 1217. "Perrexerunt igitur audacter, obliquando tamen dracenam, id est *loof*, acsi vellent adire Calesiam. (So they stretched out boldly, but with the *dracena*, that is the loof, slanting as if they wished to go to Calais.) It is clear that they sailed either on the wind, or at least fairly near it; but exactly how the meaning comes out of the words does not seem to be explained. They slanted the "dracena." But what was the "dracena"? The ship itself? If so, why not the plural? Also, if so, how is the grammar of "*loof*" to be explained? It looks like a noun in apposition to, and explanation of, "dracena."

In the "Roman de Brut," nearly contemporary with the above passage, there is a description of a fleet getting under way. The sailors run about the ships, set up the shrouds, loose the sails, and then occur the lines:—

Li un s'efforcent al wyndas  
Li altre al loef e al betas,

while aft are the helmsmen and officers. The rest is also curious and difficult, but does not illustrate the point immediately in hand. The meaning is that some of the crew exert themselves at the windlass, the others at the "loef," and the "betas." Jal ("Arch. Nav." I., 171 *sqq.*) guesses, simply guesses, that the luff was the lower corner of the sail, and that "betas" were the halliards. He produces no contemporary evidence in favour of this explanation, and indeed from the late evidence he does quote it seems clear that "betas" probably meant ropes in general.

But here is the greatest stumbling block of all. From the inventory of *La Philipe* (1336): "one mast, one sailyerde, one lof and one bowesprete" (these two being bracketed together). All these were of wood. The ropes and sails are given separately, with their cost; so that there can be no doubt that the "lof" of this ship was a spar. And if of this ship, why not of the ships of the Brut, and of Hubert de Burgh? In that case the "dra-

cena " was a spar, which was slanted when the ship sailed near the wind, and its English name was " loof." But what was it ?

I do not see that there is any help for it at present. One must guess, or leave the matter alone till further evidence turns up. Such as we have does not seem to be conclusive. It does not show what was the original meaning of the word *luff*; but it does seem to show that the thing *luff* was in the 13th and in the 14th century, a spar used in sailing. In sailing with the wind before the beam it was rigged forward.

From this we may decide (but decide tentatively, for we are guessing) that it may have been a sort of moveable tack bumkin, or passaree-boom, or perhaps a cathead. If so it would have become by Henry VII.'s time, the " pair of davits standing at the lofflawes "; i.e., luff-places, which occur in the inventories for that reign. Also it would be possible to identify it with the mysterious projection which is seen below the forestage of early ships in many illustrations, a projection it may be said for which the use of a fore tack bumkin has been suggested.

If this explanation is the true one, it would seem that mediæval ships did not carry the tack to the chess tree but to the end of a spar, and that not only when on a wind, but also perhaps with a quartering wind. It would be thus a swinging boom, passareeing out the tack with a quartering wind, and carrying it forward as the wind drew ahead. It is conceivable that it may also have been used as a cat or fish davit. It is to be noticed also that Matthew Paris calls it " dracena," implying a carved outboard end, the ancestor possibly of the carved cat-head.

I am in love, at present, with this suggestion, because it seems to fit in with the evidence and to explain several passages otherwise unexplained. But I do not disguise the fact that there is more guesswork about it than is desirable.

If we accept it, there is no need to suppose that Jonah's ship cast on a wind. The passage would only mean that they got the tack to the " lofe," which they would have done with a quartering wind.

(11) I will only note here that it is not necessary to assume that " at her back " means dead aft. It would be fair to assume the wind over the quarter, the starboard tack boomed out, and the larboard sheet a little in.

(12) " He swenges me þys swete ship swefte fro þe hauen." Mr. Callender does not comment on this passage, following Professor Gollancz in making " swenges " mean " swings," i.e., the wind swings her out to sea. The explanation seems

adequate. But it is necessary to mention that the inventory of *La Philipe* (1336) shows two small ropes, named *swenge-ropes*, made of hide. Presumably therefore they were tiller-ropes; in which case it would appear that "swing," or "swenge," may in the 14th century have had the technical meaning of "to steer."

As to the second passage quoted (ll. 181-6), D. O. has noticed (p. 156 above) that at l. 184 the ship is spoken of as a *boat*, and seems to see in this a parallel with depraved modern usage. It is probably better to explain this instance, which is unsupported by any other early examples, as being entirely due to the demands of alliteration. Apart from this there is only one difficult word, "hurrok"; and here the difficulty is chiefly etymological rather than technical. There seems to be no reasonable doubt that the meaning is, in modern phrase, the after peak or run of the ship; for the rest of the explanation we must be content to sit at the feet of Professor Gollancz. And, incidentally, we may hope that he will shortly find more nautical passages in other Middle-English texts, and will again earn the gratitude of the Society by giving it the benefit of his learning.

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## THE LAWS OF OLERON.

BY A. B. WOOD.

THE "Laws of Oleron," mentioned by Mr. Douglas Owen in his article on "The Black Book of the Admiralty" ("M. M." I. 270), were a collection of rules generally observed by the shipowners, masters and merchants trading with and from Bordeaux and other ports in the Gironde. The island of Oleron, from which they were named, lies some 20 miles north of the mouth of the Gironde and appears to have been a place of some importance in mediæval times. The exact date when the laws were first committed to writing is uncertain, though it is believed