

**ADRIFT IN AMERICA: OR,
WORK AND ADVENTURE
IN THE STATES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649038084

Adrift in America: Or, Work and Adventure in the States by Cecil Roberts & Morley Roberts

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CECIL ROBERTS & MORLEY ROBERTS

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OR

WORK AND ADVENTURE IN
THE STATES.

By CECIL ROBERTS.

WITH AN APPENDIX BY
MORLEY ROBERTS.

LONDON:
LAWRENCE AND BULLEN,
169, NEW BOND STREET, W.
1891.

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ADRIFT IN AMERICA.

CHAPTER I.

MY NEW DEPARTURE.

I WAS not yet sixteen when I went to sea as an apprentice in the ship *Soukar*, 1,304 tons, belonging to Messrs. Shaw, Savill, and Company. During my four years' apprenticeship I was three times at Port Lyttelton, Christchurch, New Zealand, once in Melbourne, thence with coal to Anja Point, Java, which was afterwards destroyed by the great Krakatoa volcanic explosion. We received orders there for Rangoon, and at that port loaded rice for Europe. Leaving England again I went to Port Lyttelton once more, thence to Geelong, and being then out of my time I served as A.B. on the passage home.

My next voyage was in the barque *Bebington*, belonging to the same firm, as second mate. We went to Melbourne, thence to Timaru for orders, which sent us to Valparaiso, again for

orders, which were now finally for Antofogasta, to load saltpetre. Thence we sailed for Queenstown and Hamburg, where I left the *Bebington*.

It was on returning home that my real adventures began, for though I saw enough hard weather and did a great deal of hard work in that five years, it was after all nothing more than comes in the course of learning his profession to every young seaman. And to tell the truth, I was pretty tired of the sea. It did not take me long as a youngster to learn to discount the romance of it, which lies chiefly either in ignorant imagination, or in the memory of some old salt who has forgotten the tough salt horse and weevilly biscuit to remember that he was then young and strong and able to enjoy himself when he got a rare chance. And apart from all romance there did not seem to be very much in the business. It was not only monotonous but poorly paid. So that is the reason why I made up my mind to go to America and see what could be done there. And if I did not succeed in making money, at any rate I had a very varied time and learnt something of the inside of a country.

When I landed in New York after a rather rough passage across the Atlantic I was in very good spirits, and thought I was going to do big things, though I had a very indistinct idea of how the big things were to be done. As a start, in company with a man called Mathews, who was on board the

steamer in which I crossed the Atlantic, I went out to South Bend in the State of Indiana, where Mathews had a brother who owned a farm of three hundred acres.

Mathews' brother was building a barn that spring, and he was kind enough to give me a job "tending mason," or, as we should call it in England, mixing mortar and carrying a hod. It certainly staggered me a bit at first, but as nobody there seemed to think that there was anything *infra dig.* about it, I very soon came to look on it in the same way, and, with the rest of the people about there, to consider myself just as good as the President, even if I was not quite so clever. This job lasted about a month, after which Mathews engaged me as a farm hand for the rest of the summer at \$15 a month, and I might have stayed there some time if I had been religious enough, or enough of a humbug to make people believe that I was, but being neither the one or the other, I soon got myself into bad odour and had to shift; for some of my actions and some of my yarns rather startled the saints about that part of the country, and consequently I got the cold shoulder right and left—no one would speak to me, and I was shunned as if I had the plague. One of my offences was that when I had occasion to speak of anybody's lower limbs, I called them legs, whereas the sanctified prudes about there always called them *limbs*. They considered legs indelicate I was told, but if all was

true that I heard I fancy that there were some of the most disgusting hypocrites about that neighbourhood it has ever been my misfortune to come in contact with.

I never did anything on purpose to irritate these people, but nothing I could do was right, and I was continually running against some snag in the shape of an unwritten law which made things uncomfortable for me. On one occasion I had accepted the invitation of two men (who were considered by the religious part of the community to be two old reprobates) to drive out to a place called Lakeville one Sunday and go fishing. Now fishing of itself was not considered to be a very objectionable practice, but the man who indulged in the sport on Sunday was considered as lost to all sense of moral responsibility, and to be, at least until such time as he had repented in sackcloth and ashes, on the high road to destruction. The old fellows, both of whom were what I should call very decent square-dealing men, were quite different from each other both in appearance and disposition, one being fat and very fond of sitting down in a comfortable place under a shady tree where he would put his line in the water and sit for hours smoking and blinking, quite content if he never got a bite, just so long as nothing happened to make him exert himself, while the other was a thin, wiry, energetic kind of man who was everywhere and at everything, continually on the move, and would not stay more