

CUPID IN OILSKINS

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Cupid in Oilskins by J. J. Bell

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J. J. BELL

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OILSKINS**

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BY

J. J. BELL

AUTHOR OF

"Oh Christina," "Wee MacGregor Enlists," etc.



NEW YORK CHICAGO TORONTO

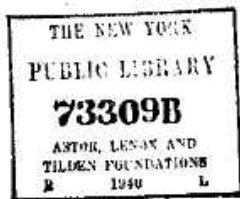
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II

To
ENGINEER-CAPTAIN C. M. NORRIS, R.N.

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I

*"I've never travelled for more'n a day,
I never was one to roam,
But I likes to sit on the busy quay,
Watchin' the ships as says to me—
'Always somebody goin' away,
Somebody gettin' home.'"*

UPON a couple of fish-boxes, in the lee of Shed No. 4—the shed near the seaward end of the East Quay of Lilport—sat Mr. Thomas Buckle, familiarly referred to as Old Tom, waiting for something to happen. Sheltered from a coldish breeze and warmed by the westering sun, he sucked intermittently at a gurgling pipe and surveyed—well, all that he could survey without the aid of his specs, the which, of late, he had shunned, save in the most urgent circumstances.

War had had the odd effect of rendering Mr. Buckle as sensitive with regard to age as the proverbial spinster, and almost as particular about outward appearance. Not now did he dote on his long memory and neglect his rather short person; no more could he be justly suspected of attempting to qualify for Oldest Inhabitant. Oh, no; the War had changed all that. "I doubt 'twas afore my time" was a phrase now frequently on his lips, and the baggy brown homespun had given place to navy blue of regulation material, if not cut. As for the abundant grey beard, which had added so much to dignity, and saved so much in neckties, behold it close shorn and trimmed to a point! Local gossip whispered that he had made the last-named alteration immediately after being confronted with a portrait of a certain Teutonic Admiral. As to his actual age, Mr. Buckle, having told so many fibs

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about it, in both directions, was himself no longer quite certain on the point. Enough to say that he was "seventy and upwards."

There was nothing doing on the East Quay this afternoon. Over at the West Quay sundry smallish sombre craft were loading coal, stores, and possibly—in a whisper—munitions. The East Quay, however, had been Mr. Buckle's favourite resort, weather favourable, since his retreat from business—"the proveesion trade, in a small way"—some ten years ago. And sooner or later, as he assured himself on dull days, something was pretty certain to happen.

Only the tug *Defiance* was berthed at this side, within a stone's throw from his seat, her mast and funnel alone being visible to him, for it was low water. For a good half century that funnel had been a "lovely, blushin' red"; to-day it was a greyish-black, blotched with brine.