

**A FLOATING CITY  
AND  
THE BLOCKADE  
RUNNERS**

BY  
JULES VERNE

# **Table of Contents**

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV.

CHAPTER V.

CHAPTER VI.

CHAPTER VII.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHAPTER IX.

CHAPTER X.

CHAPTER XI.

CHAPTER XII.

CHAPTER XIII.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHAPTER XV.

CHAPTER XVI.

CHAPTER XVII.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CHAPTER XIX.

CHAPTER XX.

CHAPTER XXI.

CHAPTER XXII.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CHAPTER XXV.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CHAPTER XXX.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE BLOCKADE RUNNERS.

CHAPTER I. THE "DOLPHIN."

CHAPTER II. "GETTING UNDER SAIL."

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV. CROCKSTON'S TRICK.

CHAPTER V THE SHOT FROM THE "IROQUOIS," AND MISS JENNY'S ARGUMENTS.

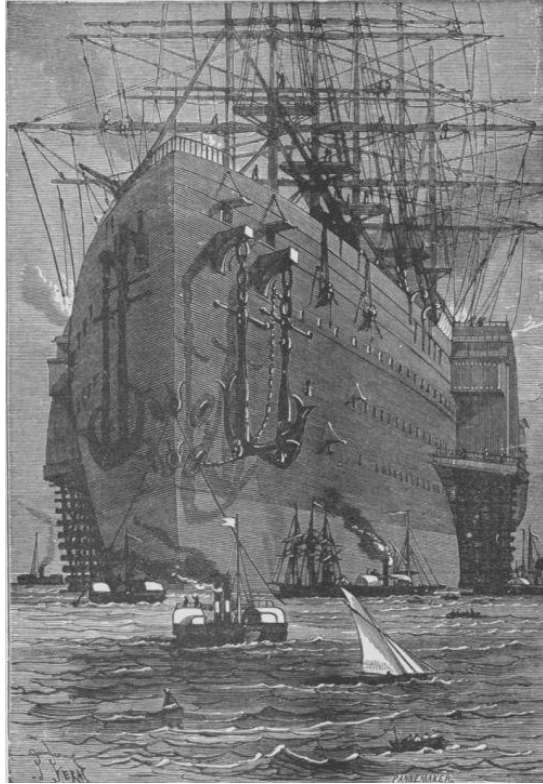
CHAPTER VI. SULLIVAN ISLAND CHANNEL.

CHAPTER VII. A SOUTHERN GENERAL.

CHAPTER VIII. THE ESCAPE.

CHAPTER IX. "BETWEEN TWO FIRES."

CHAPTER X. ST. MUNGO.



ONE WOULD HAVE TAKEN HER FOR A SMALL ISLAND.

**A FLOATING CITY.**

## CHAPTER I.

On the 18th of March, 1867, I arrived at Liverpool, intending to take a berth simply as an amateur traveller on board the "Great Eastern," which in a few days was to sail for New York. I had sometimes thought of paying a visit to North America, and was now tempted to cross the Atlantic on board this gigantic boat. First of all the "Great Eastern," then the country celebrated by Cooper.

This steam-ship is indeed a masterpiece of naval construction; more than a vessel, it is a floating city, part of the country, detached from English soil, which after having crossed the sea, unites itself to the American Continent. I pictured to myself this enormous bulk borne on the waves, her defiant struggle with the wind, her boldness before the powerless sea, her indifference to the billows, her stability in the midst of that element which tosses "Warriors" and "Solferinos" like ship's boats. But my imagination carried me no farther; all these things I did indeed see during the passage, and many others which do not exclusively belong to the maritime domain. If the "Great Eastern" is not merely a nautical engine, but rather a microcosm, and carries a small world with it, an observer will not be astonished to meet here, as on a larger theatre, all the instincts, follies, and passions of human nature.

On leaving the station, I went to the Adelphi Hotel. The "Great Eastern" was announced to sail on the 20th of March, and as I wished to witness the last preparations, I asked permission of

Captain Anderson, the commander, to take my place on board immediately, which permission he very obligingly granted.

The next day I went down towards the basins which form a double line of docks on the banks of the Mersey. The gate-keepers allowed me to go on to Prince's Landing-Stage, a kind of movable raft which rises and falls with the tide, and is a landing place for the numerous boats which run between Liverpool, and the opposite town of Birkenhead on the left bank of the Mersey.

The Mersey, like the Thames, is only an insignificant stream, unworthy the name of river, although it falls into the sea.

It is an immense depression of the land filled with water, in fact nothing more than a hole, the depth of which allows it to receive ships of the heaviest tonnage, such as the "Great Eastern," to which almost every other port in the world is closed. Thanks to this natural condition, the streams of the Thames and the Mersey have seen two immense commercial cities, London and Liverpool, built almost at their mouths, and from a similar cause has Glasgow arisen on the Clyde.

At Prince's Landing-Stage, a small tug in the service of the "Great Eastern" was getting up steam. I went on board and found it already crowded with workmen and mechanics. As the clock in Victoria Tower struck seven, the tender left her moorings and quickly ascended the Mersey with the rising tide.

Scarcely had we started, when I saw on the quay a tall young man, with that aristocratic look which so distinguishes the English officer. I thought I recognized in him a friend whom I



had not seen for several years, a captain in the Indian army; but I must have been mistaken, for Captain Mac Elwin could not have left Bombay, as I ought to have known, besides Mac Elwin was a gay, careless fellow, and a jovial companion, but this person, if he resembled him in feature, seemed melancholy, and as though burdened with a secret grief. Be it as it may, I had not time to observe him more closely, for the tender was moving rapidly away, and the impression founded on this resemblance soon vanished from my mind.

The “Great Eastern” was anchored about three miles up the river, at a depth equal to the height of the tallest houses in Liverpool. She was not to be seen from Prince’s Stage, but I caught a glimpse of her imposing bulk from the first bend in the river.

One would have taken her for a small island, hardly discernible in the mist. She appeared with her bows towards us, having swung round with the tide; but soon the tender altered her course, and the whole length of the steam-ship was presented to our view; she seemed what in fact she was—enormous! Three or four colliers alongside were pouring their cargoes of coal into her port-holes. Beside the “Great Eastern,” these three-mast ships looked like barges; their chimneys did not even reach the first line of light-ports in her hull; the yards of their gallant-sails did not come up to her bulwarks. The giant could have hoisted these ships on its davits like shore-boats.

Meanwhile the tender approached the “Great Eastern,” whose chains were violently strained by the pressure of the tide, and ranged up to the foot of an immense winding staircase, on the larboard side. In this position the deck of the tender was only

on a level with the load water-line of the steam-ship, to which line she would be depressed when in full cargo, and which still emerged two yards.

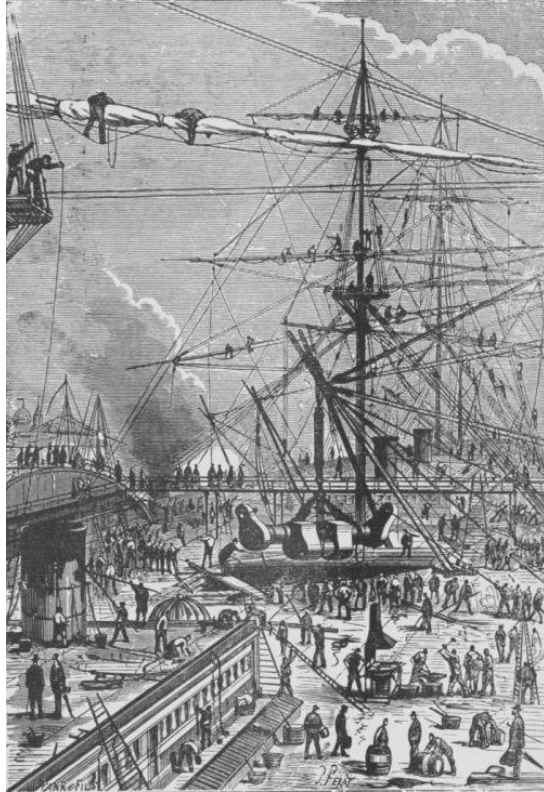
The workmen were now hurriedly disembarking and clambering up the numerous steps which terminated at the fore-part of the ship. I, with head upturned, and my body thrown back, surveyed the wheels of the "Great Eastern," like a tourist looking up at a high edifice.

Seen from the side, these wheels looked narrow and contracted, although their paddles were four yards broad, but in front they had a monumental aspect. Their elegant fittings, the arrangements of the whole plan, the stays crossing each other to support the division of the triple centre rim, the radius of red spokes, the machinery half lost in the shadow of the wide paddle-boards, all this impressed the mind, and awakened an idea of some gigantic and mysterious power.

With what force must these wooden paddles strike the waves which are now gently breaking over them! what a boiling of water when this powerful engine strikes it blow after blow! what a thundering noise engulfed in this paddle-box cavern! when the "Great Eastern" goes at full speed, under the pressure of wheels measuring fifty-three feet in diameter and 166 in circumference, weighing ninety tons, and making eleven revolutions a minute. The tender had disembarked her crew; I stepped on to the fluted iron steps, and in a few minutes had crossed the fore-part of the "Great Eastern."

## CHAPTER II.

The deck was still nothing but an immense timber-yard given up to an army of workmen. I could not believe I was on board a ship. Several thousand men—workmen, crew, engineers, officers, mechanics, lookers-on—mingled and jostled together without the least concern, some on deck, others in the engine-room; here pacing the upper decks, there scattered in the rigging, all in an indescribable pell-mell. Here fly-wheel cranes were raising enormous pieces of cast-iron, there heavy joists were hoisted by steam-windlasses; above the engine-rooms an iron cylinder, a metal shaft in fact, was balanced. At the bows, the yards creaked as the sails were hoisted; at the stern rose a scaffolding which, doubtless, concealed some building in construction. Building, fixing, carpentering, rigging, and painting, were going on in the midst of the greatest disorder.



### CARPENTERING, RIGGING, AND PAINTING.

My luggage was already on board. I asked to see Captain Anderson, and was told that he had not yet arrived; but one of the stewards undertook to install me, and had my packages carried to one of the aft-cabins.

“My good fellow,” said I to him, “the ‘Great Eastern’ was announced to sail on the 20th of March, but is it possible that

we can be ready in twenty-four hours? Can you tell me when we may expect to leave Liverpool?"

But in this respect the steward knew no more than I did, and he left me to myself. I then made up my mind to visit all the ins and outs of this immense ant-hill, and began my walk like a tourist in a foreign town. A black mire—that British mud which is so rarely absent from the pavement of English towns—covered the deck of the steam-ship; dirty gutters wound here and there. One might have thought oneself in the worst part of Upper Thames Street, near London Bridge. I walked on, following the upper decks towards the stern. Stretching on either side were two wide streets, or rather boulevards, filled with a compact crowd; thus walking, I came to the centre of the steam-ship between the paddles, united by a double set of bridges.

Here opened the pit containing the machinery of the paddle-wheels, and I had an opportunity of looking at this admirable locomotive engine. About fifty workmen were scattered on the metallic skylights, some clinging to the long suction-pumps fixing the eccentric wheels, others hanging on the cranks riveting iron wedges with enormous wrenches. After having cast a rapid glance over these fitting works, I continued my walk till I reached the bows, where the carpenters were finishing the decoration of a large saloon called the "smoking-room," a magnificent apartment with fourteen windows; the ceiling white and gold, and wainscoted with lemon-coloured panels. Then, after having crossed a small triangular space at the bows, I reached the stem, which descends perpendicularly into the water.

Turning round from this extreme point, through an opening in the mists, I saw the stern of the "Great Eastern" at a distance of more than two hundred yards.

I returned by the boulevards on the starboard side, avoiding contact with the swaying pulleys and the ropes of the rigging, lashed in all directions by the wind; now keeping out of the way, here of the blows of a fly-wheel crane, and further on, of the flaming scoria which were showering from a forge like a display of fireworks. I could hardly see the tops of the masts, two hundred feet in height, which lost themselves in the mist, increased by the black smoke from the tenders and colliers.

After having passed the great hatchway of the engine-rooms, I observed a "small hotel" on my left, and then the spacious side walls of a palace surmounted by a terrace, the railings of which were being varnished. At last I reached the stern of the steamship, and the place I had already noticed where the scaffolding was erected. Here between the last small deck cabin and the enormous gratings of the hatchways, above which rose the four wheels of the rudder, some engineers had just finished placing a steam-engine. The engine was composed of two horizontal cylinders, and presented a system of pinions, levers, and blocks which seemed to me very complicated. I did not understand at first for what it was intended, but it appeared that here, as everywhere else, the preparations were far from complete.

And now, why all these delays? Why so many new arrangements on board the "Great Eastern," a comparatively new ship? The reason may be explained in a few words.

After twenty passages from England to America, one of which was marked by very serious disasters, the use of the "Great Eastern" was temporarily abandoned, and this immense ship, arranged to accommodate passengers, seemed no longer good for anything. When the first attempt to lay the Atlantic cable had failed,—partly because the number of ships which carried it was insufficient—engineers thought of the "Great Eastern." She alone could store on board the 2100 miles of metallic wire, weighing 4500 tons. She alone, thanks to her perfect indifference to the sea, could unroll and immerse this immense cable. But special arrangements were necessary for storing away the cable in the ship's hold. Two out of six boilers were removed, and one chimney out of three belonging to the screw engine; in their places large tanks were placed for the cable, which was immersed in water to preserve it from the effects of variation of the atmosphere; the wire thus passed from these tanks of water into the sea without suffering the least contact with the air.

The laying of the cable having been successfully accomplished, and the object in view attained, the "Great Eastern" was once more left in her costly idleness. A French company, called the "Great Eastern Company, Limited," was floated with a capital of 2,000,000 francs, with the intention of employing the immense ship for the conveyance of passengers across the Atlantic. Thus the reason for rearranging the ship to this purpose, and the consequent necessity of filling up the tanks and replacing the boilers, of enlarging the saloons in which so many people were to live during the voyage, and of building extra dining saloons, finally the arrangement of a thousand berths in the sides of the gigantic hull.

The "Great Eastern" was freighted to the amount of 25,000 francs a month. Two contracts were arranged with G. Forrester and Co., of Liverpool, the first to the amount of 538,750 francs, for making new boilers for the screw; the second to the amount of 662,500 francs for general repairs, and fixings on board.

Before entering upon the last undertaking, the Board of Trade required that the ship's hull should undergo a strict examination. This costly operation accomplished, a long crack in her exterior plates was carefully repaired at a great expense, and the next proceeding was to fix the new boilers; the driving main-shaft of the wheels, which had been damaged during the last voyage, had to be replaced by a shaft, provided with two eccentric wheels, which insured the solidity of this important part. And now for the first time the "Great Eastern" was to be steered by steam.

It was for this delicate operation that the engineers intended the engine which they had placed at the stern. The steersman standing on the bridge between the signal apparatus of the wheels and the screw, has before his eyes a dial provided with a moving needle, which tells him every moment the position of his rudder. In order to modify it, he has only to press his hand lightly on a small wheel, measuring hardly a foot in diameter, and placed within his reach. Immediately the valves open, the steam from the boilers rushes along the conducting tubes into the two cylinders of the small engine, the pistons move rapidly, and the rudder instantly obeys. If this plan succeeds, a man will be able to direct the gigantic body of the "Great Eastern" with one finger.



For five days operations continued with distracting activity. These delays considerably affected the enterprise of the freighters, but the contractors could do no more. The day for setting sail was irrevocably settled for the 26th of March. The 25th still saw the deck strewn with all kinds of tools.

During this last day, however, little by little the gangways were cleared, the scaffoldings were taken down, the fly-wheel cranes disappeared, the fixing of the engines was accomplished, the last screws and nails were driven in, the reservoirs filled with oil, and the last slab rested on its metal mortise. This day the chief engineer tried the boilers. The engine-rooms were full of steam; leaning over the hatchway, enveloped in a hot mist, I could see nothing, but I heard the long pistons groaning, and the huge cylinders noisily swaying to and fro on their solid swing blocks. The muddy waters of the Mersey were lashed into foam by the slowly revolving paddle-wheels; at the stern, the screw beat the waves with its four blades; the two engines, entirely independent of each other, were in complete working order.

Towards five o'clock a small steamer, intended as a shore-boat for the "Great Eastern," came alongside. Her movable engine was first hoisted on board by means of windlasses, but as for the steamer herself, she could not be embarked. Her steel hull was so heavy that the davits to which it was attached bent under the weight, undoubtedly this would not have occurred had they supported them with lifts. Therefore they were obliged to abandon the steamer, but there still remained on the "Great Eastern" a string of sixteen boats hanging to the davits.

## Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

