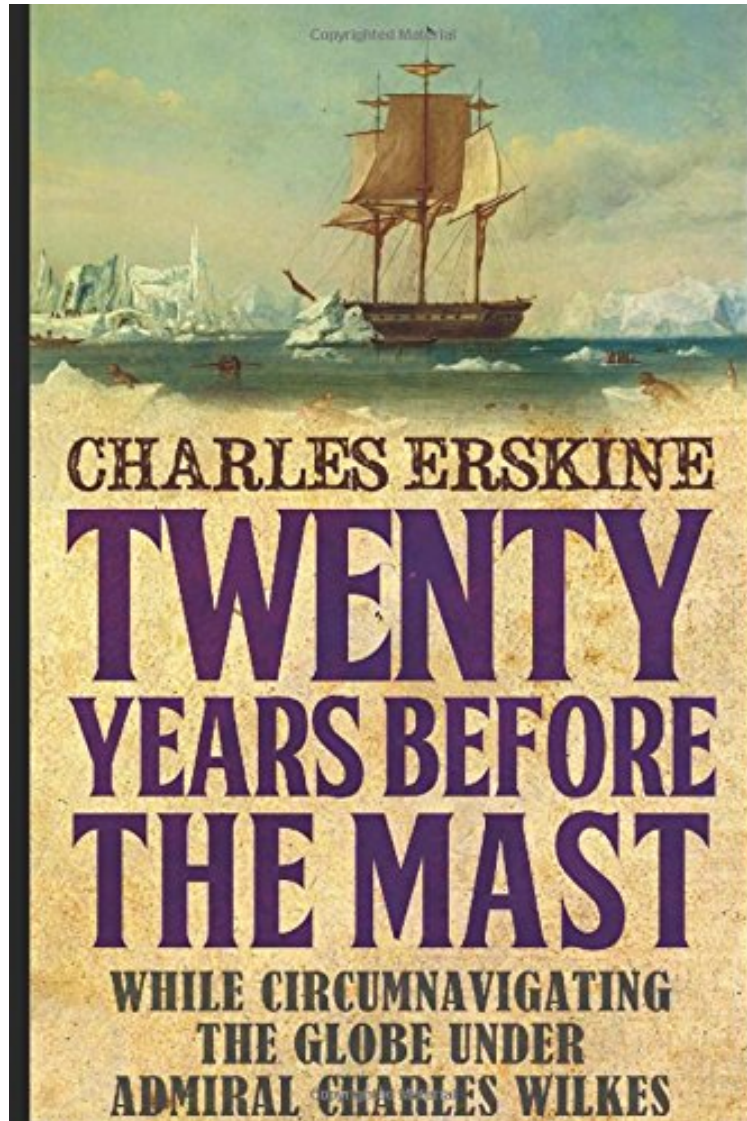


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Twenty Years Before the Mast

Charles Erskine

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Charles Erskine : Twenty Years Before the Mast before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Twenty Years Before the Mast*:

In 1838 the able-bodied seaman Charles Erskine joined the exploring expedition of Charles Wilkes who was setting out on a voyage of discovery around the world. From the Pacific to Antarctic to Atlantic, Erskine would travel with this expedition to the furthest corners of the Earth. He would go on to travel to some of the most unexplored regions,

meeting men and women who had never seen westerners before. Along the journey the crew meet Patagonians, Fijians, Tahitians, Aborigines, and many other peoples. Although the Wilkes expedition was largely scientific mission, the ships were not always peaceful, indeed there were a number of armed conflicts with Pacific Islanders as the United States began to assert its authority across the globe. The ships and their crews had to withstand some of the most appalling conditions as they continued their expedition, from the heat-driven mirages of the South Atlantic to the brutal cold of the Antarctic seas. What makes Erskines narrative so remarkable is that he is not writing from the perspective of an admiral or a scientific explorer, but instead from the viewpoint of a common sailor. Interspersed throughout the narrative are short ditties and sailors songs that provide a vivid picture of the mentality of nineteenth century seamen. After the Wilkes expedition landed back in the United States Erskine spent only brief moments on dry land as he frequently registered under new ships and continued his journeys. Erskines book is a fascinating first-hand account of exploration and maritime life aboard a tall ship. *Twenty Years Before the Mast* was published in 1896 towards the end of Erskines life.