

rough, tough, undisciplined and the bane of the existence of the deck officers and engineers who had to be responsible for them.

I found the chief engineer in his cabin on the upper deck amidships, and introduced myself to him. We looked each other over and while I had no idea what he thought of me, I knew his appearance was not exactly prepossessing at first glance. He was tall and had a prominent paunch, also a very gloomy expression enhanced by a heavy mustache of the drooping or "walrus" type. He wasted no time on the amenities but announced without preamble, "No sick men allowed on board a tramp ship my boy."

I knew he was putting me on notice that I should probably be very seasick but would have to keep on my feet and stand my watches in the engine room, even if I felt like death, all of which I did in due course. The warning was unnecessary as I knew enough about the sea to be fully aware that the worst bout of mal de mer is not regarded as a reason for a member of a ship's crew to take to his bunk.

It was the custom in many ships of the size and type to carry a junior engineer to stand the chief engineer's watch for him, and that was to be my job, one advantage of which was that the Chief naturally had the best watch, from 8 a.m. to noon, and from 8 p.m. to midnight, thus allowing most of the night in bed, unless called out for some reason.

The Chief must decide how much responsibility to let me have, because he would be technically responsible for any errors I made. In the two or three days before the ship sailed and for the first few days at sea, he kept a fairly close eye on me and quizzed me from time to time in order to find out if I had really worked and studied as I should have done during my apprenticeship.

I managed to field all his questions about the engines and boilers, including some that I think he fully expected would baffle me. Once he made up his mind about me he left me

SO I ARRIVED IN CARDIFF ONE wet and windy morning in January, and hired an ancient, horse-drawn cab to take me to the docks, where my ship was loading a cargo of coal destined for Marseille. The export of coal was still an important item in the national economy, though the trade was beginning to feel the competition of the cheap, low-grade coals mined in countries like Japan, India, New Zealand and others.

The first thing I noticed about the ship was the Lascar quartermaster on watch at the gangway. I was glad to see that the ship carried a Lascar crew because I knew from talks with my brother Dudley and with other men who had served at sea with Asiatic crews, that either Chinese or Lascars were much to be preferred to the type of white men who might be willing to ship as sailors or stokers, especially stokers in tramp ships.

I had heard many discussions about the relative merits of Lascars and Chinese, the consensus being that the Lascars were more docile and amenable to discipline, but the Chinese were tougher and less likely to collapse in an emergency. Opinion was unanimous that the majority of white men who were still willing to be stokers or sailors in tramp ships were

very much alone while on watch, sometimes never coming down into the engineroom for weeks at a stretch.

The ship was owned and registered in Glasgow and of the nine white men on board seven were Scots. The chief engineer was Welsh and I was the only Englishman on board, often referred to as, "the bloody Sassenach," sometimes in the spirit of good, rough, shipboard fun and occasionally in more serious vein.

The 2nd and 3rd engineers were typical Clydeside mechanics, good men at the job for which they were well trained as apprentices in marine engineering plants, for a minimum of four years and sometimes as much as seven years, from the school-leaving age of 14 till 21. They were physically and mentally tough and had that pride in their craft that would not let them be baffled by those "unforeseen" contingencies with which engineers at sea must cope. They are only unforeseen in the sense that one never knows what will happen next or when, but can be sure it will be something and that in mid-ocean there is no well-equipped repair shop near by to help.

The Chief had told me in my first interview with him that they did not encourage the Lascars to learn English, as it might help to give them wrong ideas about race equality. So it was necessary to have at least a smattering of their language, Lascari Bat, which is one of the many dialects of India. Actually it is mixed with some English words for which they have no corresponding term, and is a sort of *lingua franca* in general use by seafaring folk and quite helpful in finding one's way about ashore in the seaports of the Orient, and in countries other than India.

I had picked up some words from one source and another before I went to sea, and had managed to acquire a phrase book in Cardiff. I have always had a certain facility for picking up live languages by ear, much more readily than I could learn Latin or Greek from textbooks at school.

As the Chief kept very much in the background most of

the time, my immediate boss was the Second, who spoke with a very marked Glasgow accent and used some words that seemed almost like a foreign language. One of the first things he told me to do was to open a certain steam valve, and when I asked him where it was he replied, "Awa up forbye the lum," which I was able to translate as, "On deck near the funnel."

I was not always so successful and he was very sensitive about any suggestion that his speech lacked purity, especially from a despised Sassenach like myself; he also had a very quick temper. He was irked when he noticed that the Lascars understood me better and asked me how I had learned Lascari. Hoping to be helpful I was so naïve as to try to explain tactfully that it was his Scots accent that baffled them, at which he took umbrage quickly as usual and poured on my well-meaning head the vials of his wrath in such a volume of vitriol, that I resolved on the spot to leave all such good deeds in future strictly to the Boy Scouts. I am sure that any student of linguistics who heard him speaking to the Lascars would regard it as a memorable experience.

The ship docked in Marseille on a fine, sunny Sunday morning in what would be early spring there, and the weather in great contrast to the typical English winter we had left behind only 10 days before.

The mooring lines were no sooner made fast than a welcome committee of young girls with an older chaperone (if that is the word) came on board. In my youth and ignorance I was surprised to see them allowed on the ship at all, especially on Sunday, but it was only for mild fraternization and the distribution of business cards with little maps on the back, to facilitate finding them where they lived.

The French have poetic names such as, "Daughters of joy" or "Butterflies of the Night" for these girls who make a career of entertaining men, with what some regard as the height of hospitality. I was surprised to find they were not done up and

bedizened like the far-famed citizeness of Babylon but dressed neatly in quiet good taste, while their behaviour on the ship was decorous, like working girls of a good type anywhere.

Some of my shipmates recognized former acquaintances among them and there was much gossip and reminiscing, with exchange of news of mutual friends and other ships in all parts of the seven seas, who had been promoted and who was expected to be in Marseille again before long.

The girls tried to extract promises to visit them ashore but I am afraid business was far from brisk owing to lack of money. It was too early in the voyage and my shipmates had either banked their surplus cash from the previous voyage, or spent it all on riotous living ashore before signing on again for another spell at sea, each according to his custom.

We were all nominally on a monthly wage but during a voyage received only very small sums doled out by the Captain at his discretion from time to time when the ship was in port, and always with the impression that it was a favour and was grudged. I never did understand whether any of us could, if it came to a point, claim the full amount owing to us at the time.

There was some grumbling with suitably sulphurous comments on the alleged parsimony of the Captain, but we all knew really that it was a good system of enforced saving, and were glad at the end of a voyage when we were all paid off automatically with a good round sum in gold sovereigns and those wonderful, crisp Bank of England five-pound notes. Even the thriftless ones felt they had better value in riotous living in the United Kingdom than in most foreign ports. The system suited me well enough as I had not acquired a taste for reckless spending, and was bent on saving as much as possible toward a "grub-stake" for the emigration I planned.

All ship captains know that the less money men have the less is the risk of them getting into trouble ashore, especially the kind of trouble that means the Captain must try to ransom

them from the clutches of the local police, or possibly even cause serious and costly delay to the ship. Once upon a time it was possible to simply abandon troublesome crew members with a feeling of "good riddance," but now all countries have more or less strict immigration rules that preclude such a simple solution, ships being heavily fined for crew members left behind.

Discharging the cargo of coal in Marseille took about 10 days, after which we went with empty holds to Torrevega in Spain to load salt for Calcutta. There was no harbour at Torrevega then and the ship anchored about two miles from the shore. The salt was brought out in 30-ton lighters propelled by large oars with man-power.

I had somehow acquired the popular belief that most Spanish men were indolent by nature and given to putting everything off till "mañana," but I had to revise the notion after seeing those stevedores of Torrevega at work. I doubt if they had a trade union then and were probably paid by the ton rather than by the hour, but they loaded the ship in record time without the aid of modern mechanical equipment, just old-fashioned shovels. Their diet seemed to consist largely of bread and cheese and garlic, with some fish at times.

When we sailed the ship was if anything somewhat over-loaded, with the Plimsoll mark below the waterline. There were no port officials to bother about such a detail, and when we arrived at Calcutta after burning some 700 tons of bunker coal the Plimsoll was just on the waterline.

It was customary for the charterers to give the Captain a bonus on the tonnage of cargo carried, and in theory the bonus was supposed to be shared with the chief engineer whose co-operation could help toward the most favourable results. There was a widespread belief that such men might be able to retire early if they wished to do so, but there would be an element of luck in this, depending on the type of ship and the sort of cargoes carried.

There was no opportunity to go ashore in Torrevega and little apparent inducement to do so. It looked like a collection of small, white-washed houses on a sun-baked strip of sandy shore on the edge of an arid hinterland.

The salt came from a natural salt factory consisting of a large, shallow lagoon with a subterranean syphon connection with the sea, so that the water was evaporated by the warm, Mediterranean sun and the salt left behind to be shovelled up and loaded into ships with no further processing.

The Second cut a jaunty figure as he leaned on the rail with his hat at a rakish angle and a large cigar at a different but equally rakish angle, while he looked at the village on shore. Removing the cigar for a moment and spitting nonchalantly in the sea he made the terse comment, "Och! a hundred hooses and twa' whoorrs." The last item was a rough estimate of course but I thought him well qualified as an authority.

Most people find passage through the Suez Canal for the first time an interesting experience. It is well named "The Gateway to the East" as the whole atmosphere seems to change from Occidental to Oriental on arrival at Port Said.

Anchored in the harbour waiting our turn to enter the canal we were boarded by Arab bumboatmen eager to do business with us, if only to swap some of their strangely assorted wares for an old pair of pants. I think their real object may have been to obtain entry to one's cabin with a view to pilferage. They are reputed to be among the world's cleverest thieves. The Chief enjoined me strictly not to leave the engine room without being sure the stout steel door was double-locked. He said, "The blighters will steal the main bearings of the engines or the milk from your tea if you take your eyes off them for a moment." Only the word he used wasn't blighters.

Steaming down the Red Sea for the first three days or so after leaving Suez, the weather was nearly perfect. Then the following breeze began to die down and the thermometer in

the engineroom to creep up, till I began to wonder how high it would go by the time we were off Aden. The engineroom was not well ventilated and as the temperature rose to 120°F. it became uncomfortably hot to work in for four hours at a time. The next time we passed Aden some months later the maximum was 145°F. which was much worse of course, though by that time I had become adjusted to the condition about as well as I could be.

It was actually cooler in the stokehold where a strong draft came down two large ventilators to supply air to the six furnaces. This was just as well because the job of stoking marine boilers with coal is hardly a fit one for human beings, especially when the coal is of poor quality.

With good coal in the bunkers we used about 20 tons a day for steady steaming at 8 knots, and the stokers had a comparatively easy job. By the time we reached Calcutta the bunkers were empty and were replenished with Indian native coal, which was so poor that we used 30 tons a day or more and the stokers had a tough time to keep steam up to the required pressure. Even worse than stoking was the job of trimming, or shovelling coal in the cramped space of the pitch dark and dusty bunkers, to where the stokers could reach it easily.

To my knowledge no-one succeeded in inventing a satisfactory mechanical stoker for marine use, though a number of clever men tried. When the crack transatlantic liners, *Mauretania* and *Lusitania* were coal-burners they used 1,000 tons a day, or 5,000 tons for each 5-day crossing on the New York run. Every pound of coal was shovelled into the furnaces by hand and the ash and clinker raked out and shovelled into the hydraulic ash-ejectors. The coming of oil fuel for ships has been a great boon.

I had often heard and read of the balmy, spice-laden breezes that give notice of the approach to tropical shores some time before land can be seen. Ceylon quite lived up to its reputation

in this respect and as I never had the chance to go ashore there, I was saved the disillusion experienced on finding that sometimes distance lends enchantment. Other exotic tropical shores were not nearly so pleasant to the olfactory sense at close quarters, to put it mildly.

Tramp ships had no wireless in those days and according to custom we passed close enough to the Point de Galle, to "make our number" with a string of flags to the signal station there, so that the news of our passing would be relayed by telegraph to the agents in Calcutta, the owners in Glasgow and Lloyds in London.

Some days later we arrived off the mouth of the Hooghly River and picked up a Bengal pilot for the difficult passage of some 80 miles to Calcutta, difficult because the ship channel is narrow and winding between the mudbanks, the currents very strong even to a high tidal bore at times, and a low-powered ship must on occasion anchor to wait for the tide to turn.

We did anchor that night at a place called Budge Budge, opposite a large factory building that I learned was a jute mill. Later on I was agreeably surprised to see the extent of modern industrial development of various kinds in India, most of it promoted by British capital, technical knowledge and enterprise. It gave the lie to much of the subversive propaganda so actively spread by agitators about the alleged "exploitation" of the native population in favour of British industries. The tragedy was, then as now, that efforts to raise the living standards of the mass of the people were thwarted by the too rapid increase in population.

Years later when I travelled about the United States on business bent, I met many Americans who held forth to me about the iniquity of the system under which (they said) the poor, downtrodden Indian coolies were forced to toil under the tropical sun to grow cotton, for which they received a mere pittance, despite which they were expected to buy back

the cotton after it had been sent to England to be made into shirts, and all this at a fabulous profit to the greedy, grasping grinders of the faces of the poor.

It was quite a bedtime story but typical of the sort of thing widely believed by Americans, who are basically kind-hearted and seem curiously susceptible to such propaganda, while not allowing themselves time to ascertain the true facts. They are taught by their history books to think of King George III as a black-hearted tyrant, whose oppressive ideas still probably form the basis of the policies of successive British governments, or so they seem to want to believe.

They have allowed themselves to become obsessed with dislike of even the most beneficent form of colonialism, with results that are only too plain now in the deplorable state of some of the newly independent countries of Africa, or for that matter India as well. It is of course possible that some of them may be influenced by the notion that cotton is better grown in their own deep south by negro share-croppers, rather than by the coolies in far-off India.

Arriving at Calcutta the ship dropped anchor in the river off the Maidan, a spacious savannah which was a centre for much of the social and sporting life of the city. It took three weeks to discharge the salt that was loaded at Torrevega in 4 or 5 days, owing to the customs department rule that the salt must be carefully weighed as it was hoisted from the holds, and before it was taken ashore.

This delay to the ship must have increased the cost of the salt to the consumers but from the viewpoint of the ship's engineers it was not unwelcome, as it gave us a chance to carry out needed maintenance to the main engines and auxiliary machinery.

I was especially glad of the long stay in port because I was able to see something of my sister Inez and her husband and small son and daughter, in the evenings and weekends, when I was not on duty aboard the ship.

Before the last of the salt was unloaded we heard that our next assignment was to be a six-months time charter in the Calcutta coal trade, which meant carrying coal mined in India to sundry ports in the Far East, such as Rangoon, Colombo, Bombay, Karachi and others. It was not regarded with pleasure by mates and engineers as it meant the ship would be driven as hard as possible, so that the largest number of voyages could be made within the charter period. There would be a minimum of opportunity for any form of relaxation ashore, while the Captain and Chief Engineer would be paid a bonus by the charterers, based on the tonnage carried by the ship.

A special drawback for me was that sometimes cargo would be worked at night, which involved my staying up all night and getting what sleep I could in the daytime, despite the noise, dense clouds of coal dust over everything, and getting up for meals if I wanted any food at all, a most comfortable existence, to which by tradition of the sea the "dogsbody" is automatically elected.

The coal was loaded in Calcutta in the Kidderpur Dock, which the ships entered through lock gates at high tide. It was a long dock with berths for 10 or 12 sea-going ships of good size. Only one berth was equipped with modern cranes for handling cargo, and it was always the last to be filled. It was cheaper to use hand-labour, with long lines of men and women coolies carrying coal in baskets on their heads, tramping up one gang-plank, dumping the contents of the basket in the hold, and going ashore for another lot down another gang-plank.

I shall remember the coal dock at Calcutta as long as I can remember anything, but words fail to do justice to the scene. Most of the time eight or ten ships would be loading simultaneously, with six or eight long lines of coolies tramping up and down the gangways to each vessel. There was a permanent fog of coal dust and the whole scene reminded me of Dante's

Inferno, especially at night when the cooking fires in the coolie lines on shore glowed and reflected through the black fog, while the coolies looked like hundreds of lost souls wandering about in search of something to drink, and keeping up a dirge-like chant that was both continuous and extremely monotonous.

Fortunately it took only three or four days to load the ship as a rule and it was a relief to get away to sea again, and see the decks and hatches washed clear of the mess of black dust. It was not so easy to get it out of one's clothes and bedding and everything one possessed.

Our first load was destined for Rangoon in Burma, a short run of four or five days till we anchored in the River Irawaddy opposite the city, for the cargo to be discharged into lighters. The only way to get ashore involved hiring a native sampan, which I did on Sunday morning, in order to see something of the town and especially the famed Shwe Dagon Pagoda with its gilded roof, which I thought quite came up to its reputation as something unique.

When the ship was in port the engineers put in a full 8-hour day at work on maintenance jobs, most of which were in the engineroom, which was uncomfortably warm for hard work. We usually had Saturday afternoon and Sunday off when in port though one deck officer and one engineer must be on board and available at all times day and night, in case of need.

The usual native bumboatmen came on board with the customary assortment of merchandise, including sewing materials, proprietary remedies for sundry ailments and trinkets of the cheaper sort to take home as souvenirs or gifts for friends. Some of my shipmates bought hundreds of Burmese cheroots to take home and smuggle ashore. Their story was that any question with the Customs officials could be readily solved by a gift of 50 cheroots, but I have no personal knowledge of any such transaction taking place.

Some hours before the ship was due to leave for the return

to Calcutta, I was taken ill with one of those bad intestinal upsets that were even more common in the tropics in those days than they are now. There was some talk of getting me to a doctor but the Captain decided to dose me himself from the ship's medicine chest. He prescribed castor oil as he said "To get it over with." The Chief said that was all wrong and gave me a sort of cocktail of laudanum and opium, a recipe of his own.

By then I was feeling like death and past caring what happened to me, but I must have had a strong constitution because I survived in spite of the well-meant ministrations of the amateur medicos. I am sure they both wanted me to get well if only because the Captain would not want the red tape involved in accounting for a body, and the Chief would dislike having to stand his watch in the heat of the engineroom. It was no joke to anyone in good physical condition and he was decidedly overweight.

I stood all my watches on the trip to Calcutta though by the time the anchor was dropped there I was so weak I could hardly climb up the steep steel stairs from the engineroom to the main deck. The Captain hurried ashore and came back with a doctor who looked me over and said I should go to hospital and be fed on calves foot jelly and essence of chicken.

I noticed the Captain's face getting longer at the thought of such expensive luxuries for a mere junior engineer, so I piped up and suggested I might go to stay with my relatives ashore, which was adopted unanimously and with evident relief.

My brother-in-law was engineer-in-chief of the Bengal-Nagpur railway which gave him the status of a "Burra Sahib" or executive, and a very pleasant bungalow in a lovely tropical garden setting, complete with peacocks stalking sedately about, flaunting their gorgeous plumage in the bright sun and making their uncouth noises.

My sister and her husband were very good to me and I enjoyed a brief interval of gracious living, while the resilience

of youth and a good constitution helped me to a speedy recovery from a most unpleasant and even dangerous experience.

Many years later in what I suppose was advanced middle age I had several narrow escapes from a similar experience in tropical countries, where it is wise to be constantly on guard against infected food or drink. Once in the island of Barbados I lost 10 pounds in one night but had the advantage of approved remedies in our own bathroom cabinet, and was spared the efforts of amateur doctors experimenting with the limited resources of a ship's medicine chest.

My brief respite from the discomforts of life aboard ship in the Calcutta coal trade came to an end all too soon, when I reported on board just before departure for Colombo in Ceylon, a few days steam southward down the Bay of Bengal.

Again we anchored in the harbour and had small chance to go exploring ashore, where the scenery looked very attractive from the ship. The Singalese coolies worked hard and discharged the 6,000 tons of coal in five days or so, without the help of any modern equipment for handling the stuff, just shovels and the ship's steam winches.

It was part of my job to make running repairs to the winches between ports, working in the afternoons when not on watch in the engineroom. It was a fairly tough life with long hours of work under conditions that were physically trying, mainly owing to the heat.

On watch in the engineroom was rather like being stewed alive in one's own juice, and "working at winches" in the afternoons resembled being grilled alive on the hot steel deck by the tropical sun almost directly overhead.

While the ship was at sea my hours of work added up to about 80 per week, though in case of trouble it could be 24 hours per day till the job was done. My very modest stipend was by the month with nothing said about overtime. However, I was getting what I wanted from it, which was the technical experience plus the feeling of self-confidence that comes from

doing a tough job under difficult conditions, and knowing one has done it well; the pay was relatively unimportant.

On our return to Calcutta I found an invitation to spend a weekend at Curraghpore, a "railway" town about 70 miles away on the mainline of the Bengal-Nagpur, and the site of the main repair works for the rolling stock.

I believe my brother-in-law was largely responsible for planning the place, including the living accommodation for the native workers and the white executives and foremen. The latter were responsible for training and supervision of the native artisans, and I was impressed with the quality of the work being done in the machine shops and other departments.

They were building some of the passenger coaches and what the British call "goods wagons" and Americans call "freight cars," and planning to build some locomotives in the near future. I had noticed that some of the engines in use were made in Germany, and was told that it was the policy to buy equipment on the open market, with no pressure to "buy British," though the whole railway had been financed by British capital.

It was a favourite complaint of critics and agitators that India was "exploited" for the benefit of British industry, but I saw much evidence of the falsity of such canards.

The Bengal-Nagpur was said to be the second largest railway in India, and from what I saw of it I thought it was well managed. The crack train was the Bombay Mail which gave a daily service over the 1,500 miles from Bombay to Calcutta on a 36-hour schedule, with an average speed of 42 miles per hour including stops. This was comparable to the best long-distance trains in North America at the time, in the year 1910, and the first class coaches were equally luxurious, lacking only air-conditioning which did not come into general use on the American railways for another quarter century.

As it happened our next trip with coal from Calcutta was for the B-N Railway, which illustrates the fact that it is cheaper

to transport goods by sea than by land. The coal needed by the railway for its own use could be carried 3,000 miles by ship at lower cost than it could be carried 1,500 miles by its own trains.

Our first trip to Karachi provided some mild excitement of a kind that seafarers always have in mind though it actually materializes rather rarely. When "making our number" to the signal station at Point de Galle, Ceylon, we were asked to keep a sharp lookout for a liner called the *Trieste*, carrying mail and passengers to Bombay and said to be drifting helplessly with her single propeller shaft broken, in bad "monsoon" weather. Her passenger list was said to include an ambassador and other assorted V.I.P.'s which might not increase her salvage value but helped to make for bigger headlines in the newspapers of the world.

Our only chance was to actually sight the stricken vessel and the monsoon season meant poor visibility. In those days passenger liners had wireless but tramp cargo ships had not. The *Trieste* was actually sighted and taken in tow by a British cargo ship called the *Lowther Range* that had left Calcutta 24 hours ahead of us, also bound for Karachi. Owing to the stormy weather they had quite a struggle towing her to Bombay and lost two or three men overboard, including the 2nd engineer, while replacing tow-lines broken in the rough seas.

Some weeks later we were again in the Kidderpur Dock in Calcutta at the same time as the *Lowther Range*, when they heard that the salvage award was 80,000 pounds sterling, a really substantial sum in those days, part of which would go to the owners and the rest to the members of the crew. The prospect of salvage was always exciting.

Our second trip to Karachi coincided with the end of our six months charter in the coal trade and the news that our next job would be to take a cargo of wheat in bags to Hull in England. It seemed odd at the time for a country like India in which large scale famine seemed to be endemic in one