CHAPTER III - AWAY TO SEA

Corrected

My mother spent many hours preparing my sea chest for my first voyage. This great wooden box, exactly like hundreds of others used by naval cadets, was stongly built with iron bound corners and rope beckets for handles. The top section consisted of a ditty box, a fitted wash-bowl, soap dish and tooth brush section and a tray for minor articles of clothing or toilet. Below these shallow trays was the sea chest proper with room to stow cold weather gear, wet weather gear, tropical gear and everything else the young sailor might need. In addition to a very carefully thought out kit my mother tucked in little presents and a series of envelopes to be opened on certain dates, for she knew we would be unlikely to get any letters until we were ~~getting~~ nearing our terminal port or even homeward bound. In those days of no air mail the seaman was cut off from news of home for weeks and sometimes months on end.

My father, somewhat to my surprise, announced that he would be coming with me to see me aboard my ship. This was the 'Dunvegan Castle' built, I believe, in 1894 and then, in 1920, an old stager of 26 years old. She was, of course, coal fired, with a single screw of some 32 ft. pitch, driven by a triple expansion engine. She had an enormous funnel and in her early days carried square sail on her foremast. She was about 5000 tons gross and commanded by Captain Imlah.

We set off one bright August day for the East India Docks where we arrived by train. The porter looked at my seachest with some astonishment but refrained from comment and loaded it and my hand luggage on a two-wheeled trolley. Perhaps he thought it too late in the day to tell us that nobody ever took wooden seachests to sea these days! We then set off. Soon we came to one of the lock gates and it was clear that the seachest was far too wide to pass between the stanchions and chains provided to prevent the unwary from plunging into the lock or the turgid Thames, which was at a very low ebb and enclosed by banks of unpleasant-looking mud. The porter calmly unfixed the stanchions and allowed them to splay outwards at an angle, then, picking up his trolly he proceeded to teeter across the narrow lock gate while my father and I looked on in horror, both certain that my sea-chest was likely to go to sea, via the ebbing muddy river, long before I did. Not so. With that skill and sang froid, for which porters in general and Thames-side ones in particular are famed, our guide and helper negotiated not only this gate but another as well and arrived alongside 'Dunvegan Castle'.

Suggesting to my father that he leave protocol to me, I reported on my own to the Chief Officer who obviously had some difficulty in restraining a smile at my formal "Cadet Middleton, sir, come aboard to join" in the very best Captain Marryat style.

Shortly afterwards his amusement was more easily restrained when it became apparent that the seachest would not go down the narrow alleyway into the cadets' cabin. The ship's carpenter was sent for and this usually imperturbable member of the crew became almost excited when it became necessary to remove several bits of hand-rail, bulkhead and so on in order to get 'the monster-r' as he called it, into the cabin. Having seen me safely installed, apparently for good, my father wished me good luck and a pleasant voyage and departed. My fellow cadets did not pull my leg about having come to sea rigged out as in Nelson's day and were, I think, rather proud of my seachest.

I soon discovered that I was in a new and strange world, for which two years at Pangbourne had done little to prepare me mentally. The other three cadets with whom I was to share a cabin about 12 feet by 7 feet had all done several voyages. One had finished his indentures but had failed the seamanship portion of the Board of Trade examination for 2nd Mate and had been sent back to sea for another six months. The other two were about half way through their four years and neither of them came from one of the three training establishments of the day, Worcester, Conway or Pangbourne. Nevertheless, all three had one thing in common, a complete obsession with sex. Except on rare occasions and for short intervals the conversation in the half deck - and for that matter in most of the officers' cabins

and the fo'c'sles - was on sex in all its ramifications with a morbid partiality for gruesome clinical details of the results of careless promiscuity. At first, I felt as if I had fallen into a cesspit and life at sea lost its healthy, manly image in a flash. Although I had acquired a good working knowledge of sex, its meaning and its dangers, this aspect was something far more intricate, involved and unpleasant. Every sort of perversion was mentioned in conversation at the first meal and it was clear that seasickness was one of the minor necessities for having a strong stomach. However, the revulsion and bewilderment wore off in time and I came to accept this as one of the inseparables of life at sea.

When learned bodies discuss or pontificate on sex education for children I often wonder how fitted they are for the task. They would certainly learn a lot in a ship's fo'c'sle! There is little real evidence that before this preoccupation with sex at six, children suffered from lack of instruction. Indeed, the majority learned all too soon, for as in the garden of Eden, once innocence is lost it is lost for ever and to have a few illusions in youth is not a bad thing. Of course, any girl who got 'into trouble' always said 'I didn't know' and they probably still do. Personally, I have never believed the story that primitive men and women believed that babies came from eating fish.

Indeed, there appears to be indications that education generally has got badly off course and that this is due to

educationalists having lost their sense of direction, if not of proportion. It is as if the theory was, "It does not matter what you pump into your pupils as long as you make it interesting and do not insist on any of them doing anything unless they wish to do so". More and more modern science is the watchword and the threat of not being able to keep up with the rest of the world is constantly used. The simple fundamental facts are neglected as old hat. It is astonishing that men have walked on the moon at a time when few educated citizens could answer half a dozen simple questions about it. Questions which any fisherman or farmer would answer from practical experience. Possibly the teachers of today have lost touch with reality themselves.

"Dunvegan Castle" made her way out of the East India Dock basin with Pilot Dean giving the orders under the watchful eye of Captain Imlah. Mr Dean was one of the best known 'mud pilots' and handled ships with casual expertise.

My first job afloat was to hoist the house flag at the mainmast. A friendly quartermaster decided to supervise the operation and showed me how to make up the flag for breaking at the masthead. In the river we anchored and carried out boat drill and the passengers came aboard by tender. The Chief Officer told us off into watches and put me on the 4 to 8. Ingham, the old hand, was on daywork and the other two cadets, Spriggs and Maltby on the 8 to 12 and 12 to 4.

The voyage down channel and across the Bay of Biscay was probably calm and without incident as far as I can remember. I was switched from my watch to daywork and I remember waking up one morning to the realisation that the ship's engines had stopped. The cabin fan was whirring gently and through one of the portholes I could see the grey-green of Gibraltar's Europa point. This was my first sight of the famous rock and my first port abroad. The memory is very vivid today.

'Dunvegan' was a coal burner and we coaled at Gibraltar. This meant a great deal of hard work cleaning ship afterwards and as dayworker I spent most of my time at the job on and around the bridge with the help of the cadet on watch during working hours. The normal routine was for the 4 to 8 cadet to start scrubbing the bridge on his hands and knees at 6.0 a.m. and the dayworker would join in when he came on duty at 7.0 a.m. Having scrubbed the bridge, both cadets would proceed to clean all the brass work - engine-room and docking telegraphs, compass binnacles, scuttle rims and so on. The cleaning materials provided were oil, brickdust and canvas. This cleaned the brass if used with sufficient vigour but would not produce much of a polish unless the oily film was removed with French chalk and this commodity was very hard to come by. After one has cleaned brass pretty well daily for nearly three years, it begins to pall. There were many occasions on which

I would have given a week's pay for a tin of Brasso.

Pay was rather different for apprentices at sea in those days as compared with today's inflated rates. We got £12 the first year, £18 the second year, (and a splendid £24 the third year. $36 the fourth year) As far as I know none of us received any allowance from home except perhaps a pound to start the voyage with, so we really learned the value of money. We were usually able to earn two or three pounds each voyage by tallying, in out of the way ports, and on one occasion we received a months pay (£2) for assisting in putting out a fire at sea. But generally cadets were expected to do any work required, from cleaning out bilges to chipping and red-leading over the side of the ship. Navigation usually came last on the schedule. The most important job was looking after cargo - seeing that it was stowed properly and with sufficient dunnage, discouraging pilfering and making out a cargo plan to assist in discharging the contents of the hold in due course. To me, cargo work was always fascinating and the wide variety of goods carried in the general cargo outward bound, the native products homeward bound and the wide knowledge of techniques required to ensure safe carriage and handling was of absorbing interest.

From Gibraltar we sailed for Marseilles and here a cousin of mine, Rex Middleton, came on board and later took me ashore to see the sights. Rex had married a French woman and to me looked

a typical Frenchman. There was a Colonial exhibition on in Marseilles at the time and we spent an interesting afternoon there in an atmosphere of French Africa and Indo-China. I felt I had seen a lot of the world already, although I had hardly been at sea a week. Today, when everyone has been abroad on holiday and air travel has shrunk the earth into a rather wizened globe, the wide wonder of a sixteen year old on his first voyage must seem more than a little dated. But apart from seamen and soldiers, there were not many people who saw much of the world outside their own country in those days.

There were, of course, exceptions - I remember being in a tiny little pub in Buckinghamshire in the 1930s and a young man was astonishing all present with stories of his experiences in the middle east. Suddenly an elderly villager by the fire said quietly "I shall never forget Petra, 'the rose red city, half as old as time'. I was with Allenby's force in 1917". I realised then that wars take men from their quiet villages and show them other peoples and other places they would never see otherwise. War is not all loss. Indeed, war produces a unity of purpose, a solidarity, a comradeship which transcends the brutality and uselessness of battle.

From Marseilles we sailed for Naples where we came to an anchor in the famous bay. We were almost immediately surrounded by ~~barn~~ bum boats full of gesticulating Italians offering a wide range of bargains. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say a wide range of articles for which to bargain, for of course the initial price asked was a long way from the one expected. Indeed, it is almost certain that most of the passengers would have felt cheated had they not been able to indulge in the delightful chaffering.

"How much?"

"This very besta kind but I give you good price - ten shillings!"

"Nonsense, I give you two shillings"

"Oh, sir, sir, you verree hard man but I like you. Eight shillings!"

"All right. I give five shillings"

"All right. You put money in basket". (The basket being attached to a line thrown up on to the promenade deck.)

"No, you send up the goods first. I want to see".

And so the time would be whiled away in a bright, brisk, exotic atmosphere quite lacking when the ship lies alongside a wharf and there are no bum boats.

Soon, however, the vendors were finding their way on board and setting up markets all over the place. With many cabins unlocked security was becoming a worry so the Chief Officer instructed cadets and quartermasters to run the invaders off the ship " - even if you have to throw them over the side!"

With my five feet two inches I was hardly likely to impress even the smallest Italian but orders are orders so I picked a dimminutive seller and, walking on the steam pipe casing which ran down one side of the alleyway, ran him along to the after gangway where the quartermaster seized him and hustled him down to a boat. As he went over the side he looked round to see who his captor was and nearly burst with indignation when he saw the small, thin cadet responsible. The Chief Officer had also seen the episode and related it to all and sundry for weeks afterwards. "Never mind, Middleton", he said "If you don't grow we'll get you a pair of stilts." There were also some rather obnoxious suggestions as to how I could be made to grow.

At this time I was still on day work and Chief Officer's doggie or general dogsbody. One of my regular duties - sometimes several times a day - was to "Go and find the carpenter" This was a most frustrating task as ship's carpenters have an almost supernatural ability for disappearing. Round the ship I would go and it was not very big; some 360 feet long and 50 feet beam. "Seen chippy?" I would ask all and sundry, usually getting a facetious but quite unhelpful reply. After half an hour of this a quartermaster usually came up with the brisk instruction "The Mate wants you. Says he could make a carpenter quicker than you can find one". When I tried to solve this eternal problem by asking Chippy where he got to he would almost invariably answer "I was sounding round".

So I asked if I could come round with him and see how it was done. It was a useful experience.

The life of a cadet was not very different from that of an ordinary seaman or able seaman, depending on his experience and ability. After the usual early morning deck scrubbing and brass cleaning on the bridge, the days work at sea normally consisted of cleaning paintwork using a soap powder known as Suji Muji, cleaning other brasswork, chipping, painting and scraping. Various more seamanlike jobs cropped up occasionally, like making cargo slings, overhauling derrick gear and so on. We usually took a morning sight for longtitude and mustered with the officers on the bridge for the noon sight. Instruction was practically non-existent and one was obviously expected to learn by precept and example. Most officers were ready to help if asked but I do not remember anyone ever offering to give lessons. What you did not learn at sea you could no doubt pick up at the navigation school which most cadets attended for a few weeks before sitting their exam. Nevertheless one did learn - seamanship, navigation and possibly most important of all, how to live with and handle men.

In addition, life at sea induced a philosophy quite different from any outlook life ashore was likely or even able to engender. A possibly fatalistic knowledge that man proposes but God, or fate or at any rate some higher authority disposes.

A full realisation of the forces of nature and the puny ability of man, however voluble, skilled or intelligent. Indeed, the sea soon emphasises the superiority of common sense over mere knowledge.

Some time after leaving Naples an agitated steward came rushing up to the Chief Mate and said that one of the 3rd class passengers, an Italian who boarded at Naples, was running amok with a dangerous looking knife in his hand. The Chief sent for the doctor and sick bay steward and with two quartermasters we started to track down the madman. The idea was to get him into the alleyway in which the sick-bay was situated and with half our party at one end and the other half at the other, force him along to the sick-bay and lock him in. Gradually we closed in, everyone keeping a wary eye on the knife, the madman himself showing signs of concern at the unequal battle. The sick-bay door was open and as the man got closer the Chief Mate said 'Now!' and all the hands closed in and quickly man-handled the victim into the sick-bay and slammed the door. Immediately there was a frightful noise inside, hammering on the door and cries of 'Let me out'. We were all dispersing when it occurred to me that someone was missing. It was the Chief Mate, who must have failed to disentangle himself! Very carefully the door was opened. There was the supposed madman, cowering pitifully on one of the bunks, obviously

terrified and the Chief Mate in a similar state, trying to get out of the door as rapidly as possible. It was a hilarious moment and I had little doubt that the two quartermasters' grins included a certain amount of self-satisfaction.

Port Said and coaling ship again. All the coal came aboard in baskets carried by diminutive Arabs; some of them looked about ten years old, and in many cases might have been females. Most of the passengers went ashore to avoid the coal dust and once again a spring clean was necessary to get the ship habitable.

The passage through the canal I found fascinating and on one occasion, when we tied up to allow a north bound convoy to pass, the Chief Mate decided to bathe. He astounded us all by diving off the boat deck into the narrow stretch of water between the ship and the canal bank. I remember very little about him now except that his name was Woodcock and that he was rather short and fat and usually had a pretty girl ironing his clothes or sewing on buttons. This seemed to me an excellent arrangement as I was always dismissed to the half deck for a smoke on these occasions. A large searchlight was put aboard at Port Said and this was slung over the bow in a large box. At night a vivid beam of ~~the~~ light illuminated the canal and banks as ordered by the pilot, the training of the searchlight being carried out by a man in the box. By night the canal and the

desert took on an unreal, theatrical quality which, when experienced for the first time, certainly holds most people spellbound.

We arrived at Suez some time in the middle of the night and as the Chief Mate had to go forward to his station on the fo'c'sle head for anchoring in Suez bay, I was automatically called for 'stations for anchoring'. As soon as we had come to an anchor the Mate sent me for some iced water. Going along one of the alleyways an attractive young girl came running out of her cabin and said some men were trying to break in. Very confidently for my sixteen years I marched into her cabin, looked out of the porthole and said "Its only the canal search-light being taken off. There's nothing to worry about", and marched out again. When I related this - as I thought - rather naïve behaviour on the part of a nervous female to my fellow cadets I thought they would have hysterics. "She didn't want reassuring, you fool", they insisted, "She wanted comforting". Certainly the suggestion that a different code of morals applies on board ship, particularly where women are concerned, appears to have some basis in fact. There is an undoubted romanticism about ships and perhaps this affects the yielding instincts of women. Propinquity too, obviously plays a large part. Or perhaps it was due to the fact that, until comparatively recently, the only other nocturnal amusement on board ship consisted of card games.

Once into the Red Sea and the heat became stifling. A light following breeze meant that ventilators and wind scoops in port-holes failed to produce a worthwhile draught and below decks the ship got hotter and hotter. There was no artificial ventilation and the temperature in the engine room and galleys soared up to 130° and 140° fahrenheit. Several cases of heat stroke occurred and the Second Steward died as he crossed the fore deck early in the morning. He was buried before noon. A number of passengers collapsed and were assisted by some doctors travelling to take up duties in the Congo.

The ship called at Port Sudan and a number of cases landed with the cargo were opened up not far from our berth and the contents displayed to passengers as native souvenirs. Spear heads looking distinctly antique but shipped from Birmingham were having shafts of native wood fitted on the spot. This sort of thing naturally made one distinctly wary of buying any 'genuine' native products.

The cadets were given shore leave to have a bathe and warned to keep sunhelmets on, except when actually in the water. There was a shark-proof enclosure provided and the sight of three hammer-heads doing some interesting formation swimming close inshore seemed a very good reason for keeping inside the protection. Except that we were not quite sure that the sharks were not inside, too. One cadet translated

the instructions to wear his helmet except when in the water a little too literally and dived in with it on. The shock of the wide-brimmed helmet hitting the water nearly broke his neck and he promptly retired hurt.

Aden meant coaling again and the heat and the coal dust combined to make life very trying. The ship's stay was short, as is usual at Aden, and we sailed at dusk into the south-west monsoon. This blows across the Indian ocean from May to October and for a great deal of the time is not far short of gale force, producing a very unpleasant sea and a very humid atmosphere.

Almost immediately on leaving Aden I went down with heat stroke and a phenomenal temperature. One of the other cadets told me the sick bay steward said it was 106° but whatever it was I made a quick recovery and was back on duty again in 48 hours.

The little ship was labouring in the heavy seas off Sokotra and it is doubtful if anybody really enjoyed the passage. Certainly faces were much more cheerful when we steamed into the splendid harbour at Kilindini, where the majority of our passengers departed. Here we bathed from one of the ship's life-boats in the middle of the harbour, keeping a wary eye for sharks and also landed on the mainland opposite our anchorage for a walk through the bush in the

cool of the evening. We passed a native village and heard sounds of all sorts of insects and animals but saw little of them. It was just what I had come to sea for - amongst a lot of other things, of course.

The ship's stay in port was entirely governed by the amount of cargo to be discharged and loaded, so that generally there was very restricted opportunity for getting ashore. The usual routine for cadets would be to be standing by the hatches first thing in the morning waiting for the stevedore gangs to open up and commence work. It was essential to keep a very close watch to prevent pilfering. Valuable cargo and goods, particularly liable to pilfering were normally stowed in the 'tween decks or orlop deck in locked grilles. Even so, cases did get broached and one foreman stevedore insisted that some of his men could get a bottle out of a case with the watchman sitting on it. On one occasion in Aden I was sitting on a broached case of sweets waiting for the ship's carpenter to come and nail it up and sitting next to me was a young native tally clerk. After a while I noticed that he seemed to be getting fatter and then I realised he had slipped one arm out of the sleeve of his native dress and was removing packets of sweets with his long narrow fingers and stowing them round his waist. I moved the case quickly, trapping his hand and his howls brought a very irate foreman stevedore along, who banished

the culprit to a less attractive job.

Some of the native gangs working cargo were extremely villainous looking chaps and the head men or serangs were far from gentle in their methods of persuasion. Occasionally a general altercation would take place and as there was usually plenty of dunnage (wood or mats used to keep cargo off the iron decks and ship's side) about, weapons were handy. I have seen a serang laying about him with a six feet length of 3"x 3" quartering with nails in it, belabouring half the gang unmercifully. At the bottom of a lower hold in company with some fifteen or twenty angry and excited black men, I do not remember ever thinking 'I had better get out of here'. On the other hand one did not interfere with these domestic disputes. As long as the work was done properly and no pilfering took place a few broken heads or lacerated backs had to be tolerated.

From Mombasa we sailed to Zanzibar and long before the island was in sight the heady scent of cloves filled the warm air. Zanzibar has - or certainly had at that time - a strange exotic air quite different from any other port. The town itself is certainly more eastern than African and the many races and colourful costumes reminiscent of a scene from Chu Chin Chow. Little Indian children beautifully dressed and looking like expensive dolls, muscular negroes, Arab sailors, Moslem women with only their eyes visible -

the narrow streets provided an ever changing pattern of colour and humanity. Cool white buildings with the famous iron studded doors which are characteristic of Zanzibar. Open shops with vendors of everything from electric kettles to betel nut. It would be a very unimpressionable traveller who failed to respond to the magic of Zanzibar.

But Zanzibar is never likely to fade in my memory for another reason. On one occasion we were loading a large cargo of cloves, which came aboard in big matting covered bales. We were working all night and I was in charge of the main hatch. The warm night air, heavy with the scent of cloves, proved too much for my ability to keep awake and, sitting on one bale with my back against another, I quietly dropped off to the lullaby of the natives chanting as they slung the bales up out of the square of the hatch, building tier after tier.

I awoke suddenly and found I was in pitch darkness. Worse, as I felt round, I realised I was surrounded on all sides, above and below by bales of cloves and already the air was lacking in oxygen. I let out a yell of panic and almost immediately I heard a bale being moved and the light of an electric working cluster shone down on me from some six feet above, showing also a row of grinning black faces and white teeth. A hand reached down and I was hauled up on top of the two tiers that had been built over me.

"You no-good watchman", said the ring leader reproachfully, as they proceeded to fill up the hole I had occupied. Having heard stories of people being buried in grain and other cargoes, I certainly took note of the lesson offered and never went to sleep in the hold again.

From Zanzibar it is only a few hours steaming to Dar-es-Salaam, which in those days had only recently ceased to be part of German East Africa. The approach to the harbour is dramatic, the ship steaming in at right angles to the tree-lined beach as if determined to run ashore. Then, suddenly, the entrance opens out on the port hand and under full helm the ship swings purposefully round and through the narrowest of gaps into the fine expanse of the harbour. Ashore, neat white buildings with red roofs nestle attractively among the trees as the ship comes to an anchor. Just outside the entrance lay the remains of a German cargo vessel, the Koenig (Not to be confused with the cruiser Koenigsburg, which ended her career at Tanga, a few miles north of Zanzibar).

Dar-es-Salaam has always seemed to me one of the most delightful places I have visited. Had the chance of a job there ever come my way I should have accepted instantly. Many years later when I was staying at a pension in Egypt the proprietress was showing me some of her water colours

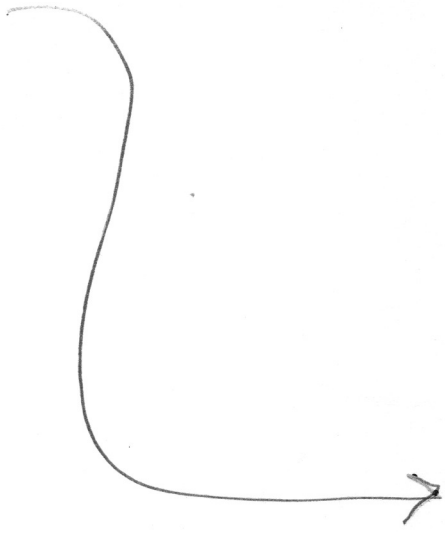
when I said,

"Why, that's Dar-es-Salaam!"

The lady was so pleased with this instant recognition that she gave me the painting on the spot and I have it to this day.

At one of the east coast ports we were working cargo at night and at my hatch we were unloading sheet iron. The sheets were about ¼" thick and some eight feet long by four feet wide. There would be about four or five sheets in a chain-sling. Just as one sling was lifting clear of the bottom of the lower hold a movement of the ship made it swing suddenly and a lower corner caught one of the natives on the shoulder making a fearful gash and exposing the bone. I got him up on deck and along to the surgery where the sick bay steward told me the doctor was in his bunk with a high fever. The steward himself had a poisoned hand and said simply "You'll have to sew him up". He showed me where the needles and gut were stored and then told me to take the bottle of iodine and pour it over the wound. The native surveyed all this stoically and gave no sign of distress, but when I had threaded the needle and made a start at my first surgical operation, I found human flesh is much tougher than I had imagined and it was only with great difficulty that I got the needle through.

In fact I did suggest that a sailmaker's palm and needle would have been handy but the sick bay steward only shuddered and said he had never seen such a ghastly mess as I was making of the poor chap's shoulder. Eventually the wound was closed, although it could hardly be called a neat job, and the native was taken ashore. There was an amusing sequel to this on my next voyage when, on arrival at the same port, the foreman stevedore said "there's a deputation to see you" and there was my patient with the most ghastly puckered scar, and several other natives who were apparently his relations. I thought they had come to take it out of me for ill-treating him so, but the foreman explained that on the contrary they liked his scar so much they wanted me to do something similar for them. Apparently the girls of the tribe were very partial to fancy scars!



Then Our next port of call was Port Amelia in Portugese East Africa. This was not a usual port of call and facilities for handling cargo were extremely primitive. It was, however, a magnificent land-locked harbour and no doubt in due course it will be developed. After the ship had come to an anchor, dhow-like vessels were rowed out from the shore, the 'oars' being saplings without any attempt at a blade on the end. Progress was naturally slow and slower still when the vessel had been loaded with cargo. Native stevedoring gangs came aboard but few of them had any experience in working cargo and they had to be given a practical demonstration of how to make up a sling. Even so they frequently omitted to get slings hooked on correctly and with an enthusiastic but unpracticed winchman only too ready to heave away the cases in the sling would go tumbling in all directions. It was rather a ragtime performance but everybody took it in the best of spirits and to add to the attraction we all got paid a few shillings for special duties. Many of the natives brought off African finches in beautifully made bamboo cages. I bought one for the price of an old shirt and took it home to my mother, who thought the world of it. He lived and sang, apparently happily, for eight or nine years until he was, unfortunately, frightened to death one day by the cat who jumped up on his cage. As far as we could tell he was uninjured.

After Port Amelia, came Mozambique, where we made a very short stay, sailing the same day and then on to Beira. All these ports, of course were in Portugese East Africa at that time.

At this time there were no quays for sea-going vessels at Beira and we anchored some way off shore in the wide estuary. The coast is flat and from the ship one could only just about see the shore. In fact, it was a very dull port and in the rainy season extremely damp and depressing. At the same time it was an extremely busy place, serving the whole of Southern Rhodesia. Large quantities of lead and copper were shipped and outward cargoes consisted of every type of manufactured goods from Great Britain and the Continent. Over the next few years I was to spend many weary days in Beira as it was the terminal port for many Union Castle ships.

Soon after our arrival another Castle ship arrived, the Sandown Castle, and, after anchoring, called us up by semaphore asking who was in command and what other officers were on board. When we replied: Second mate, Smith, the not un-natural query came "Which Smith?". The second mate was on the bridge at the time and said immediately "Reply 'the husband's friend' ". This was done and from the antics of those on the other vessel's

bridge it was clear that the message was clearly understood and appreciated.

A German Woerman line ship arrived in Beira about the same time as the Dunvegan Castle and she had a small tug and two lighters stowed on deck. These were put over the side using the ship's 40 ton derrick and before we started working cargo the German ship was already discharging into the lighters she had brought with her. I was very impressed with this example of German efficiency.

The ship remained some days in Beira and then proceeded to Lourenco Marques. Here we went alongside a wharf for the first time since leaving ~~Marseilles~~ Port Sudan and probably for that reason, and the shore leave it made possible, the place has always been a favourite of mine. There was an attractive square in the centre of the town where a band played daily and there was some good bathing. For some reason or another there was a curfew and if you were found in the streets after midnight you were promptly thrown into the local jail for the night. At five in the morning you were given a broom and set to work street cleaning, after which, having apparently expiated your crime, you were allowed to go.

There were some attractive cafes with attractive barmaids who probably were pretty versatile. They usually took a rather motherly interest in young cadets and in one bar I remember we rarely paid for a drink as our hostess said it was better if she tacked ours on to 'the rich customers' rounds as they can well afford it'.

Over the offices of the African Stevedoring Company was a casino and I thoroughly enjoyed playing roulette for as long as my very small means would allow. On one occasion I had a winning streak and an imposing looking gentleman asked if he might follow my luck. Naturally I said yes and within ten minutes or so he had amassed an impressive pile of opulent looking chips. As soon as I started to lose he said 'Now we stop' and gave me one of the largest chips with a polite bow. When I cashed in I found it was worth about two month's pay. Such luck never came my way again.

Durban was our next and officially our terminal port. We steamed in between the long breakwaters with the Bluff high on our port hand and the town of Durban stretching away to starboard. Inside the breakwaters the large landlocked harbour opened up with many ships lying alongside the quays stretching all along the waterfront to the Point. It was clear that the harbour was very congested and we soon leared that the main reason was a shortage of coal. In fact,

Dunvegan Castle had to wait six weeks to get enough bunkers to get home so we had plenty of time to see the town.

Almost immediately we were fast alongside, numbers of touts for the local laundries invaded the ship looking for business. The standard charge was 4/- a dozen articles, regardless of shape and size. Naturally we did not include socks or handkerchiefs but with an eye to plenty of shore leave we sent most of our dirty linen. This was a great mistake we were to learn later, as the laundries worked on a system of returning the clean clothes on the day the ship sailed and nothing we could do would persuade them to let us have ours earlier. The result was that what linen we had retained soon became unwearable and we were reduced to making 'dickys' out of face towels as a substitute for shirts.

At eight o'clock on the day after our arrival the stevedoring gangs came on board led by a massive Zulu, well over six feet tall and weighing over twenty stone. He was a magnificent man, every inch a chief, with a long bone snuff spoon stuck through the lobe of his ear. This was the Union-Castle Induna named Konka and he led his men like warriors up to the main hatch where I stood ready to oversee the discharge of cargo. On sighting me, five feet two and a half inches tall and about seven stone in weight, he held up his hand and the gangs halted. "E-baba" he boomed, in the deepest of round bass voices, "E-baba", chanted his

followers, grinning all over their faces and obviously enjoying a huge joke. They all then proceeded to go about their business. As soon as possible I asked the white stevedore foreman - who had witnessed this - what it meant. He grinned too and replied "Konka's greeting was a very polite one, He said, 'Thou art my father!'" From that time on, Konka and I were firm friends and he would often say, "I will give you one of my daughters". Some time afterwards when I was in another Union-Castle ship, the Chief mate sent for me and told me he wanted me to take a packet of sugar (a bag weighing about 56 lbs) to Konka at his quarters behind the Union-Castle office at the Point. I got a rickshaw and loaded the packet of sugar in it and set off. When I arrived at Konka's hut he welcomed me warmly and introduced me to his two wives, fat smiling creatures who were obviously not used to visits from young cadets. After a while Konka said something to one of the women who went off into a fit of the giggles and left the hut. A moment later she returned with a tiny Zulu girl about 18 months old and absolutely naked. "There", said Konka, "This is the daughter I promised you", and he told the child to come to me, which she did shyly. The Zulus were now all looking very solemn and I was terribly worried in case the whole thing was meant seriously. Whatever would my mother say if I told her I had married a Zulu girl only 18 months old?

Or any Zulu girl for that matter. So I said to Konka, "She is absolutely beautiful and I am very grateful indeed but she is rather young for me to take back to England. Could you keep her for me for another year or two?" Konka laughed and translated my speech to his wives, who clapped their hands and gave expressions of approval. But I still do not know how much was joke and how much was serious.

Durban is a lovely city and there is lot of attractive country close at hand; but with no money to spend, time began to go slowly. We would often go across to the Seaman's Mission, where we played snooker and read periodicals. It would have been nice if some local families had taken us under their wing and given us an occasional outing or provided some feminine company. As it was the feminine company available was not interested in penniless cadets.

Once cargo work was completed we spent our time scraping and varnishing the teak rails, chipping and painting ironwork and generally trying to keep the old ship is something like good order. It was frustrating to see the Mail ships sailing regularly every week, knowing they would probably be home and back again before we left.

Eventually, however, we started to load cargo for home and shortly afterwards began bunkering. Durban coal had a reputation for spontaneous combustion and it was essential not to mix it with other steam coal. Some voyages later I was to have an object lesson when the ship I was in had a fire in the bunkers from this cause.

East London, our first port on the way home, is another delightful spot and although there were berths in the Buffalo river in those days, Dunvegan Castle anchored outside. When there was a heavy swell running it was sometimes necessary to transfer passengers to and from the tender by means of a basket chair slung over the side by derrick, a method not always appreciated by the nervous.

Port Elizabeth, our next call had no wharves in those days and all ships discharged and loaded in Algoa Bay. It has now, of course, large and flourishing docks.

Off Cape Aghulas we ran into bad weather and Dunvegan Castle went through an impressive series of plunges and gyrations, rolling terrifyingly. On the bridge at times it seemed as if she must be flat on her side and the clangour of pots and pans crashing about in the galleys added to the confusion. We had no passengers on board, fortunately, and as the only green hand on board, I felt the whole act was being staged for my benefit.

We were not more than a day or two in Capetown but I managed to see a little of the town. Table Mountain, Lion's Head and the Twelve Apostles make an impressive setting for the town and harbour and on later voyages I was able to get further afield.

The stevedoring gangs here were an odd mixture of colours; some almost white, some yellow and some distinctly piebald. Here and along the coast to Durban many of the natives smoked cigarettes with the burning end inside the mouth and when I asked why, explained that the conventional method was 'no hot'. They also smoked long kaffir pipes and when they cleaned the stem with a straw, sucked off the nicotine with great relish. I often wonder whether these practices show up in the incidence of cancer among natives. In general the Cape kaffirs and white Malays as the lighter coloured types were called, were far less engaging than the Zulus. Indeed, I never felt comfortable down the hold in Capetown and rightly or wrongly felt a strong antipathy, which appeared to be mutual. I can well believe the whites would get short shrift if the Cape coloureds got the upper hand. No doubt many of our Bishops and clergy and other liberals would say curtly, "Serves 'em right". When Africans murder Africans, presumably they say they do not know any better. The truth really lies somewhere between these two extremes. So does

the health and happiness of both white and coloured but few people who know Africa would expect this desirable state to be achieved under native rule for many years to come. The dark ages of the dark continent have hardly begun and many well-meaning people are ardently assisting in adding to the miseries of millions of voiceless natives.

Dunvegan Castle left Capetown at the end of November, 1920, and began the long haul north to the Canaries. There were a few passengers on board; not more than a dozen all told. It was, of course, not the passenger season and there were better ships available. This did not worry the cadets and we spent most of our off duty time sleeping.

When I awoke on the morning of the second day out of Capetown, the ship was rolling heavily in the big Atlantic swell and she really could roll; 20° either way was easy. I saw our steward come in carrying two plates of porridge, which he put on top of the chest of drawers while he sprinkled some more water on the tablecloth to keep things from sliding off. While his back was turned the ship keeled violently over to port, the top drawer of the chest of drawers slid open, the two plates of porridge slid in the open drawers, capsizing in the process and then the drawer shut as the ship rolled back. The steward

turned round and the expression on his face when he found the porridge had gone was one of utter disbelief. Then she rolled to port again and he saw the frightful mess of porridge on someone's clothes in the drawer. Not mine, or I should have appreciated the joke less. Incidentally, the chest of drawers had a 'fiddle' or ledge round the top and it was the plates hitting this as they slid which capsized them into the drawer.

As is normal on the Cape run the weather was fine and the days pleasant all the way to Tenerife. We sighted the lofty Pico de Teyde the day before arrival, when it was still some 70 or 80 miles distant, majestic against the evening sky.

Leaving Tenerife we soon began to feel the approach of northern winter and going on watch at night wore sweaters and mufflers after days of dungaree trousers and singlets. Oddly enough, we hardly ever wore shorts.

As we neared home everyone got more and more cheerful and expectant. Everyone except Captain Imlah, that is. The 'old man' remained his calm, aloof, imperturbable self as old time ship's captains were expected to do. This epidemic of gay goodwill was known as 'Channel fever' and in some cases it was extremely infectious.

Rounding Ushant there were continual discussions as to where and when we would dock and it soon became known that Dunvegan Castle had made her last voyage for the company and was being sold to ship breakers. Also, our port was to be Southampton instead of London and the East India Dock.

Approaching the land, all eyes were strained to catch the first flash of an English light and from my look-out position in the port wing of the bridge I made out the faint loom of Anvil point light. Soon we were burning a blue light for the pilot off the Needles and when I turned in we were already entering the Needles channel.

Next day we paid off (a euphemism as far as cadets were concerned, at £18 or £24 per year) and with various old seafaring jokes about life on shore to help me, I boarded the train to return to my home and my parents. They were pleased to see me but horrified to find I had grown out of most of my clothes.