

Life On a Cattle Ship

How a Young Preacher Worked His Passage

BY REV. H. B. CLARKE

THE craving for home is ingrained in every human heart. There is no place, there never can be any place, like home. The word thrills the mind with a tumult of sacred pleasure. After a long absence the wanderer turns with eager steps in the direction of its portals. 'Tis this impulse which led two college friends and myself a few summers ago to seek the shores of England.

We chose, for a variety of reasons, a novel but somewhat rough method of travel. We decided to work our passage across in a cattle-ship; the only remuneration we were to receive being a free return trip in the same boat. Leaving Halifax on the Thursday night of the 9th of June, 1906, we arrived in Boston, that foremost champion of racial liberty, early on Saturday morning, from whence we were to sail that day by the S. S. B. After getting our luggage through the customs, we proceeded to the office of the agent, who had secured the berths for us. From here we were escorted to the shipping-office where we had to sign articles.

It was at this point that we gained our first sight of the other cattlemen who were to sail with us. There were fifteen in all, and a promiscuous and motley-muddled group they were—swarthy Spaniards, flaxen-haired Germans, sturdy Norwegians, blasphemous Americans and bear-eyed Englishmen. After we had signed the necessary papers, we proceeded with our luggage to board the steamer.

In comparison with a modern ocean-liner our ship was very small. The captain was a Welshman and he spoke in that vernacular which has been described as "the most lucid and pleasing of all English dialects." The cattle were ranged in rows along either side of the ship, and wherever possible, along the centre. There were between six and seven hundred head of cattle aboard, all Canadian bred; and splendid cattle they were. In few things has the Dominion shown greater enterprise and prosperity than in this business of cattle ranching and exportation. Twenty-six years ago the cattle trade of the West totalled twenty-five head; to-day that number has increased to one and a half million.

We steamed out of Boston harbor at midday on the Saturday, beneath an ardent sun. After we had changed our clothes for a suit more befitting the occupation we were about to pursue for the next few days, we were given instructions as to our duties. This is what they comprised. We rose every morning at four, when we gave each animal two buckets of water, a half bucket of chop feed, and as much hay as they chose to eat. We repeated the same routine directly after dinner, with the exception that we gave them one, instead of two buckets of water. For bedding, we used the hay left in the alley-ways after each feeding. At night, after supper, we swept the alley-ways so that the night watchman might have a clear passage in his rounds. Although the work was hard and, at times very odious, it did not occupy more than four hours of each day.

The ancient caste of the Hindus does not erect a more exclusive barrier between classes than is reared on board a modern merchant vessel. Certain parts of the ship are kept solely for the officers, and for a cattlemen to venture upon such holy ground would be an almost unpardonable crime. Even between the boatswain and the sailor, between the sailor and the cattlemen, there are the same impenetrable barriers; and the lowest order of all is that of the cattlemen.

Our quarters, which were in the fore-castle, consisted of a dark, evil-smelling room in the shape of an isosceles triangle, one side of which was bulged out owing to the contour of the ship. The bunks extended on the three sides in double tier, while for sleeping purposes each man was served with a blanket, a pillow, and a canvas bag, which, filled with straw, was used in the place of a mattress. In the centre of the room there was a long table, at which the men ate their meals, cut up their tobacco, and played cards. It was larger than an ordinary bedroom, and yet fifteen men were huddled into it to carry on all the functions of living, for it served as dining-room, smoking-room and bedroom all in one.

I shall never forget the first, and thank God, the only night I spent in that room. The scene comes back vividly to me now, the sour and musty smell, the dim light of the swinging sea-lamp, the grumpy cattlemen—men from the hardest walks of life—the creaking of the vessel as she plunged and rose in the sea. Hour after hour I lay in my bunk to the soothing and untrifling lullaby of old ocean, yet alk refused to come to my already wearied frame. I began reviewing the situation. What a drop it seemed from the classic halls of Mount Allsen, redolent with the mighty sayings of Homer and Virgil, of Shakespear and Milton, to this wretched hole so unfit for human habitation. The regular cattlemen did not seem to mind, for they were soon wrapt in slumber. And now the air became heavy with the warmth and odor of their breathing. Towards morning nature's sweet restorer came, I fell asleep. Upon waking my first sensation was far from pleasant. With the glue of slumber still in my eyes, and its dry taste in my throat, I became dimly conscious of much fumbling, and of a scratching of matches, the old sea-lamp still flared up dim

and smoky, and by its weird light I could distinguish men in deshabille moving about, bemoaning and cursing the fact that the hour for labor had come. But I must abandon contemplation and begin my morning task.

A To c lock a bell summoned us to breakfast. We were each served with a tin plate and cup, which showed marked evidence of having taken more than one ocean voyage, a desert-spoon equally antiquated, as well as a knife and fork which had been used upon many a piece of salt junk on previous trips. The food was not of a much higher order than the utensils, and in this respect the trip led us to have a much stronger sympathy for the sailor and habitual cattlemen. We were supposed to get coffee with breakfast and tea with supper, but they were so surprisingly alike that it would have taken a connoisseur to distinguish which was which. We had soup every day, but it too often contained some rather undesirable members of the animal kingdom, whilst of the salt junk, which is so named because of its resemblance to old ropes' ends, the least said is the better. It certainly did not bode the resemblance, either in looks or toughness. Hunger, however, is a great appetizer and compelled us to overlook many defects.

But it was not all hardship. Generally, after supper, and the last task of the evening had been accomplished, the three of us from college would gather on the after part of the ship, and talk both of the shores behind and of the land ahead. Night soon closed in upon us with its majestic presence, and subdued us into silence. The glorious orb of night rose serenely, shedding its silvery ray across the black waters, while the dome of heaven was besprinkled with myriads of stars, which twinkled with unearthly radiance. Instinctively we thought of Shelley's great sigh.

"Swiftly come o'er the waves to me,
Spirit of night,
Blind with thine hair the eyes of Day;
Kiss her until she be wearied out;
Swiftly descend o'er the western wave,
Spirit of night."

The evenings spent thus upon the deck, when we watched the ceaseless roll of old ocean, or the ever-changing sky, were among the salient features of the trip. Oftentimes, when tired with a hard day's work; weary of the almost ceaseless stream of blasphemous talk upon our ears; when we felt as though we had almost lost our former identity, we would gather thus upon the deck, we were more than amply rewarded. I shall never forget one of the sunsets we saw. The sun was a full orb golden ball, and as it slowly descended to the west it occasionally passed through a patch of cloud, the edge of which would be illuminated with a rim of rich silvery light; then once again the sun, ever sinking, would burst upon our vision and throw its golden gleam across the black waters, until finally it fell behind the horizon.

Life on the ocean lacks the variety of life on land. One day is much the same as another day. After a time things begin to pall, and oppress the spirit with a sense of foaming desolation. One tires of rolling and plunging, of climbing over moving hillocks and wallowing in the foaming valleys. Not that the sea was always dark and sullen, sometimes it was stainless blue and sometimes emerald green, but one wearies for the sight of stability. However, the days passed slowly by. Eventually we saw the low lying shores of Ireland, then the Welsh mountains. We passed into the placid and busy waters of the Mersey, up through the Manchester Ship Canal, where we were surrounded by ideal English scenery. Again we heard the thrilling notes of the skylark as it took its spiral flight; and once more felt the witchery of the long and soothing twilight so typical of an English day. We walked down the gangway from the ship, and stood once more after an absence of four long years, on the dear old sod that gave us birth. Surely there is no richer experience in life than this.

Port Maitland, N.S.

"With every rising of the sun
Think of your life as just begun.
The past has shrivelled and buried deep
All yesterdays. There let them sleep.
Nor seek to summon back one ghost
Of that innumerable host.
Concern yourself with but to-day,
Woe it, and teach it to obey
Your will and wish. Since time began
To-day has been the friend of man.
But in his blindness and his sorrow
He looks to yesterday and tomorrow.
You and to-day! A soul sublime
And the great pregnant hour of time,
With God Himself to bind the twain!
Go forth I say—Attain! Attain!"