

Some Famous Hudson's Bay Captains and Ships.

(By H. M. S. COTTER, Cumberland House, in "The Beaver.")

THE fame of old-time H.B.C. skippers has been widely heralded, but volumes might be written on the careers of those dauntless men whose courage and devotion to duty through stress and danger helped to lay the foundations on which the Company's business has grown and prospered.

When it is remembered that for more than two hundred years the great territory adjacent to Hudson Bay, and the vast country stretching from the west coast of the bay to the Rocky Mountains depended on supplies carried in sailing ships to Moose Factory and York Factory and that their safe delivery at these ports depended entirely upon those in command of the ships, our admiration goes out to those hardy sea-dogs of old Britain.

In the several hundred voyages that have been made from London to the bay it is remarkable—indeed, quite unbelievable—that the record is so clean-cut, but they have been few.

From the misty days of Captain Gilliam in the *Nonaka* down to the present time, we owe this record of success and freedom from disaster to the courage and able seamanship of H.B.C. sailing masters who displayed such unerring judgment and hardihood in navigation.

Captain Henry Bishop, a famous H.B.C. skipper of the last century, was a Londoner and a seaman of the

old school. As mate and master, he sailed for more than forty years to the bay—to York and Moose Factories. In all that period it is said he never lost a package of merchandise. To those familiar with navigation in these northern latitudes and the hazards attending a voyage to the bay, this would seem remarkable indeed.

During his forty years' service this doughty skipper sailed many notable H.B.C. ships—the *Prince Albert*, the *Prince Arthur*, the *Ocean Nymph*, the clipper *Prince Rupert*, the *Cam Owen*, the *Prince of Wales* and the famous *Lady Head*; all sailing vessels—barque rigged. Though never (as master) meeting with shipwreck, he had many perilous and adventurous cruises. He was mate on the *Prince Arthur* bound for Moose when the vessel went ashore on Mansfield Island in 1864. The weather was thick and a gale of wind was blowing at the time. On account of local attractions affecting the compasses, the vicinity has never been liked by H.B.C. captains.

In 1872, on the outward-bound passage to York, an unusually large number of icebergs was encountered in the Atlantic, and Captain Bishop, then in command of the *Prince Rupert*, had a miraculous escape from disaster. A heavy fog was on the sea. The ship was moving along under reduced sail, when suddenly there was a deafening roar, followed by an upheaval of the water which

threatened to engulf the ship. They had passed near a great iceberg and upset its equilibrium, as sometimes happens. The great ice mass—probably millions of tons dead-weight and towering higher than the ship's masts—fell directly across the wake of the vessel. I remember Captain Bishop saying it was the narrowest escape he ever had.

The years 1883 and 1884 were notable for the amount of ice met with in Hudson Straits. The *Prince of Wales* leaving London on tenth of June, 1883, bound for Moose Factory and due to arrive there between the fifteenth and thirtieth of August, did not appear till the twentieth of September. Meanwhile the staff waited anxiously. This was an unusually late date. In a hundred and fifty years the ship had arrived only twice at a later date than the twentieth of September.

On the passage out, Captain Bishop encountered ice in the Atlantic some four degrees east of Resolution at the entrance of the Straits and punched through it all the way to Charles Island. A whole month was required to sail the six hundred miles. Captain Bishop, in relating this experience, said he was best for weeks in the mighty grip of the ice king. The tremendous pressure sustained by the ship threatened at times to crush her to pieces.

She fell in again with the ice near James Bay and got clear of it only at the Gaskets, some seventy-five miles from the outer buoy in the Moose Roads.

The *Prince of Wales* was eight weeks in the ice on this occasion. The day she was signalled the people at Moose were wild with joy. I was only a "little shaver" then, but I will never forget the amount of gunpowder they banged away when this

great British seaman landed at Moose in his gig. The ship, though having sustained no vital damage, was torn and scored by her grueling experience. Long days and nights of sleepless vigil there had been during this cruise for these hardy men of the sea.

The *Prince of Wales* sailed, homeward bound, on the seventh of October and reached London safely on the sixteenth of November.

The same year, the *Ocean Nymph* from York failed to make the homeward passage, turned back and wintered at Port Churchill.

Again in 1884 Captain Bishop, outward bound, fell in with the ice about the middle of July and did not escape until the end of August south of Southampton, having experienced much cold and stormy weather and many dense fogs. The *Prince of Wales* hove in sight at Moose on the ninth of September.

On the second of October the ship weighed anchor for the homeward passage but met a solid barrier of ice a hundred miles long and entirely blocking up the Straits. Not a line of water was to be seen with a glass from the masthead. Captain Bishop, after cruising about for several days, was compelled to put about on the twenty-first of October and run back to Moose Roads.

Eighty miles from Moose, the Captain shaped a course for Charleston Island, where the ship wintered. There was no firing of cannon when it was learned that the ship was compelled to return, as a cargo of valuable furs was tied up in the country until the following year.

Captain Bishop was typical of all the H.B.C. skippers, being a man of great resourcefulness, a skilled ice-master, and a navigator of rare good judgment. I have heard it said of

him there never was a breeze that he could not weather. At Moose, where he was well known to sailors and others who had made many voyages with him, it was said he was at his best when the wind was blowing "great guns" and the green seas were washing the decks fore and aft. Most of his voyages were made without incident, but their successful termination continuously for many years, after sailing through uncharted waters, is proof of his ability and skill.

Truly great men were the sea captains who sailed to Hudson Bay! They helped keep the country on its feet during the early days of its development, and indirectly assisted in its retention for the British empire.

The *Lady Head* was one of the last of the H.B.C. sailing ships, going to Hudson Bay. She was built to the Company's special order in 1865, and named after the wife of the then Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, Sir Edmund Walker Head, Bart. The *Lady Head* was in commission for nearly forty years, an indication of her sturdy construction.

Through smaller than the *Prince of Wales*, she was a handsome ship, built on fine lines. In 1900 she made the record passage home from Moose, crossing in eight days.

The usual time taken to cross the "herring pond" in those days varied from eleven to fifteen days, but on this occasion the *Lady Head* crossed in eight days—leaving Cape Farewell on September twentieth and passing the Lizard on September twenty-eighth.

The homeward journey proved to be exceptionally quick, but the time taken for the entire round trip, a hundred and eleven days, was a record. Her commander, Captain Ford, received the commendation of the board and a magnificent silver cup, beautifully engraved. Cape Farewell (The writer had the pleasure of taking one deep draught from a visit to Captain Ford in Scotland some years ago.)

In these days of steam, the sailing ships have gone out of date and one hears them referred to as "old tubs," "wind jammers," "floating coffins" and other opprobrious names. But the H.B.C. sailing ships of the old days were unsurpassed in design, construction and sailing qualities. The *Prince of Wales* was a trim, stately vessel with lofty spars towering above her decks. Her whole rig was beautiful in its symmetry and upkeep. She reminded one of pictures of the East Indiamen, once famous on the seas, and it is quite possible she was modelled after the vessels of that type.

H.B.C. sailing ships were built to meet ice conditions, but apart from this their general construction was admirable. The art of wooden ship building was at its height when many of the H.B.C. vessels were launched. For example, the whole frame work of the *Prince of Wales* was of English oak, the timbers, beams and knees being of great size and strength. The three-inch plank was of oak. Over this, she was sheathed fore and aft and for some distance above the load-line with green heart, a tough and extremely hard wood. Massive iron plates covered her bows. The interior construction was exceptionally strong, being solid oak for several feet, bolted through and through.

Thus protected, she could punch through the ice and receive hard knocks with more or less impunity. The interior of the hull was further strengthened with heavy bands of iron running diagonally over the ceiling and bolted to the framework. To lessen the chances of damage when nipped in the ice, great beams were built into the hull below the upper decks. Throughout the whole construction, copper and copper bolts and spikes were used. The length of some of the bolts was more than four feet. I have heard the ship carpenters say it required two weeks to bore some of the holes! This of course is an exaggeration, but it indicates that these vessels were not built in a hurry or in haphazard fashion.

The woodwork and general fittings about the decks were of oak or teak and of the very best workmanship and design. The decks were of Norway pine laid by men skilled in the art, and the very seams, running in fair curves, were a fine sight to see. Water at a pressure of ten thousand pounds to the square inch could not penetrate these well-made, excellently caulked seams or find intimate water-tight joints used in the various deck structures. These shipwrights were not using bacon rind, shingle nails, tallow, and flour sacks to keep the water out!

The spars and rigging were a marvellous sight in themselves, so well were they made and set up, and there was nothing rotten about the gear. Afore and astern the masts were sound and good and right up to the "knocker." The *Prince of Wales* was an H.B.C. ship to the very porcelain door knobs on the cabins for they were emblazoned with the Company's coat of arms in rich colors. Surely the strength of these British-built ships was such as to provoke admiration. The marvellous skill displayed in their construction could scarcely be excelled.

And the order they kept aboard was remarkable. The crews were governed with strictest discipline. The decks were

always "clean as a whistle," nothing out of place; every sheet and hal-yard belayed snugly and neatly and the falls coiled down in shipshape style.

The rigging was ever in the best of order; never a ratline broken or waving about in the wind; the brass work was polished and glittering and good paint everywhere in evidence.

Under sail, never was there a sight more beautiful or inspiring! The crews of H.B.C. ships in those days were smart, active young fellows, mostly English and Shetland sailors. Fine, handsome chaps they were. Getting underway, it was a great sight to see these men going aloft. When the order was given they would race up the rigging, lie out on the yards, loosen up the canvas and slide down the backstays all in a few seconds of time.

They were usually singing sea "chanties." Nothing it seemed could be done unless there was a "chanty." Bracing the yards, they would sing; going to the cook's galley they would sing; heaving up cargo on the hand winches was accompanied by more "chanties."

It was really good for a man to go aboard one of those H.B.C. ships, for there was a mighty "healthful" air about them.

Another notable feature was the stowage of the cargoes. This art must have come down from the times of Noah (for it appears to have been perfect in his day) and it is no exaggeration to say that in the great holds, running the full length of the ship, scarcely a square inch of space was lost.

It was no light job breaking out the cargo, when it came to be discharged, so tightly and uniformly were the packages stowed. They would arrive at Moose as neat and clean and unbroken as the day they left London warehouse; year in and year out always in the same faultless first-class condition.

And such packages! Fine, strong, uniform bales and cases. Sugar, oatmeal and biscuits were packed in brand new, iron-bound oak puncheons, hogheads and tierces—all well finished. Many of the cases and boxes were dovetailed and the lids screwed on. At that time the twentieth century packing case had not yet appeared, made as it is of three-sixteenths-inch stuff and bound with a faint shadow of hoop-iron, ready to go to pieces if one happens to laugh real heartily.

(To be Continued.)

For years I have never considered my stock of household remedies complete unless a bottle of Minard's Liniment was included. For burns, bruises, sprains, frostbites, or chilblains it excels, and I know of no better remedy for a severe cold in the head, or that will give more immediate relief than to inhale from the bottle through the nasal organ. And as to my supply of veterinary remedies it is essential, as it has in very many instances proven its value. A recent experience in reclaiming what was supposed to be a lost section of a valuable cow's udder has again demonstrated its great worth and prompts me to recommend it in the highest terms to all who have a herd of cows, large or small. I think I am safe in saying among all the patent medicines there is none that covers as large a field of usefulness as does Minard's Liniment. A real truism good for 'nan or beast.

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The decks were of Norway pine laid by men skilled in the art, and the very seams, running in fair curves, were a fine sight to see. Water at a pressure of ten thousand pounds to the square inch could not penetrate these well-made, excellently caulked seams or find intimate water-tight joints used in the various deck structures. These shipwrights were not using bacon rind, shingle nails, tallow, and flour sacks to keep the water out!

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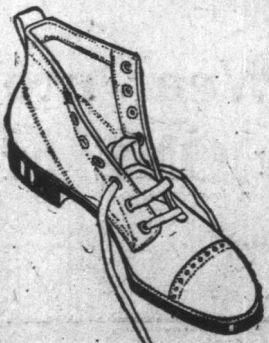
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