

CHAPTER IV

A MATTER OF BUMPS

I

THE *Princess of Connaught* was a large liner, but she was not large enough for me, as I soon began to discover. I saw my table companions at dinner that evening; I struggled to join them at breakfast, but was defeated. But the solar pad staved off complete defeat, and I managed to reach the promenade deck, where another sea tradition met me. Why is a deck-chair not considered a necessary fitting, or part of the natural furniture of a ship? One must pay for a deck-chair. It costs ten shillings to sit down outside while crossing the Atlantic. Inside you can recline on luxurious lounges, or in a variety of highly upholstered chairs in front of baronial fireplaces. But to sit down outside, in the wind and the cold, you must pay ten shillings. It is a kind of entrance fee to Invalids' Row. From it you view the monstrosly happy people who love the sea, the rougher the better.

Cold and miserable, half comatose, half giddy, I closed my eyes to shut out that dreadful wall of water which kept mounting to the sky. In three days we should be at Madeira, and in six days more at New York. In less than a fortnight, I told myself, I should be lying on white sand in hot sunshine, with palm-trees over me and the blue sea before me. But somehow Florida could not be evoked in

my misery. The moon over Miami next week could not abate my wretchedness this week.

Had all Englishmen been like me, I reflected, there would have been no Empire. I had no stomach for colonial expansion. Drake went West—he went to Florida among other places—and the gallant and handsome Sir Philip Sidney had hoped to go also, but was frustrated. There is one of the 'Ifs' of history in that thwarted design. If Sir Philip had sailed with Drake in 1585 there might have been increased treasures in Elizabethan literature, and the great Queen had not mourned the loss of a favourite courtier. For when about to go to Florida with Drake, as he intended, he was forbidden to sail by his Queen. In the month that Drake arrived back at Portsmouth from his voyage to the West Indies and Florida, Sir Philip Sidney was fighting in the Netherlands, where he received his fatal wound.

As the *Princess of Connaught* rose and fell I began to think about Drake, Florida-bound, in the *Elizabeth Bonaventure*. My ship, some thirty thousand tons, his some two hundred. My admiration of the old sea-dog rose with every pitch of the ship. I began to ponder this matter of tonnage. At what point would immensity protect me from ignominy on the face of the waters? Would one hundred thousand tons? The march of civilisation is bringing bigger and bigger ships. Perhaps by the next century they will be big enough to spare me from all seasickness. But I shall not be here to enjoy the immunity, and by the next century it is probable that mankind will have left the sea for the air.

My thoughts on tonnage grew dizzier as we ploughed through the Bay of Biscay. I peremptorily refused an offering of chicken soup served by the stewards at eleven o'clock.

Who, by the way, began this tradition of chicken soup at eleven? Why chicken soup? Why at eleven, and why only for passengers in chairs on the promenade deck? The whole thing smacks of the nursing home.

As the chicken-soup trolley was wheeled away I returned to the contemplation of tonnage, with reference to Drake and myself. It was almost impossible to believe that this ship on which I now sailed equalled in tonnage the whole of the English Navy, commanded by Lord Charles Howard and Sir Francis Drake, which defeated the Spanish Armada. For the one hundred and ninety-seven vessels under the English flag totalled only some twenty-nine thousand seven hundred tons! It was equally astonishing to reflect that the whole Spanish Armada, of one hundred and thirty-two vessels, was less than sixty thousand tons—the tonnage of a single modern liner of the latest class!

I assume that in the days of Queen Elizabeth tonnage was alike, whether applied to merchant ships or battleships. For I had learned, on board H.M.S. *Invincible* during the war, only a week before that ill-fated ship disappeared below the waves, that the tonnage of a merchant ship and the tonnage of a battleship are quite different measurements. The gross tonnage of a liner means the cubic capacity of the ship, a ton of measurement being one hundred cubic feet. The word 'ton,' being originally derived from a tun or barrel, and wine in barrels being shipped from abroad, the number of tuns on board a ship came to have reference to cargo space. The ton thus became a convenient measure upon which to levy dues.

But when the tonnage of a battleship is referred to, it is not cubic capacity which is meant, as in the merchant service, but displacement tonnage; in other words, the measure-

ment is one of tons weight, or the number of tons of water which a ship displaces by floating in it.

It was at this stage of thought on nautical matters that the deck steward approached and suggested that I should be much more comfortable in the verandah café, aft of the ship, where I should be out of the wind, and would only feel the pitching and not the rolling. For a few moments I hesitated, so uncomfortable in my person that the effort to become comfortable seemed too much. But, the kind man proving so anxious for my welfare, I made the perilous passage without mishap.

The suggestion was a good one. I was sheltered, and I looked down upon the stern of the ship, which rose to the sky, lingered there a few moments, and then plunged seawards, revealing the broad wake of white propeller-threshed water. Not a gull hovered, not a ship was in sight, grey were the sea and sky, the wind whistled past the rigging and red-lined ventilation funnels, and over all the noise of water, the screech of wind, and the endless vibration of a great ship fighting the gathering gale, rose the incessant pounding of engines, the essential heart-beat of this creature carrying us from one continent to another.

II

Two whole days of misery passed. At the end of this purgatory I remained in a state of doubt. Since I had not been actually sick, had the solar pad been somewhat effective? If I took it off, should I learn the truth? Miserable as I was, I was too cowardly to make the experiment. But only one more word upon this phase of an ocean voyage, and all the discomfort of the subsequent days until that joyous hour when I stood on the firm soil of America. My

cabin steward was an honest and straightforward fellow, and such as I had never encountered before, and may never again. One evening, after I had undressed and gone to bed, he looked at the solar pad, and then at me, and said in a tone of deep if gloomy compassion, "You'll excuse my saying it, sir, but after thirty years at sea I can tell you there isn't no cure for seasickness. You just let yourself go, sir, and you'll be yourself again all the sooner."

His downright honesty, his refusal to pander to hope, or to doctors' prescriptions, patent devices, and old wives' tales, endeared him to me from that moment. He bore the unfortunate name of Seascale, which made me think of him as Barnacle Bill, and throughout ten days I never heard him make a light remark or indulge in laughter.

We had in common a profound dislike of the sea, his being based upon a longer experience than mine, for he had been at sea for thirty-four years. I asked him why he continued to be a steward, and regretted the question the moment I had uttered it, for many men are enslaved by necessity. The answer, given in his resigned manner, bore no complaint of social injustice or economic pressure. "Well, sir, I enjoy coming into close contact with interesting types," he said, picking up my tray.

An answer of this kind provoked further question. I demanded what types he found interesting.

"Since you ask me, sir, and you won't take it personal, I hope—men of genius like yourself, sir."

My cabin at once became a cage, the ship a zoo. I was a type, under observation. I looked hard at Seascale, and though the ship rose at an angle of thirty degrees, remained calm and level-headed. His white, chinless face was as solemn as it was honest.

"I have observed, sir," he went on, turning round the plate with some spurned biscuits on it, "many men of genius who I've been steward to—Professor Einstein, Mr. Pierpont Morgan, Furtwangler, Toscanini, Sir Thomas Beecham, Mr. Tunney——"

"Tunney?" I queried.

"He was the World's Heavyweight Boxing Champion."

"Oh, yes, of course."

"Lord Lytton, Professor Houdini, Paderewski, Kreisler——"

"You're fond of music?" I asked, interrupting this spate of names.

"Very, sir; I've heard all the great artists. Whenever there's time I go to Philadelphia to hear the Symphony Orchestra, if it's playing. It's the best, sir. But I was saying, men of genius all have the same thing, the pronounced frontal sinus. It was the first thing that struck me when you came in. The head, as perhaps you know, sir, and by the head I mean the cranium——"

This had to be checked. The man was a phrenologist, and on his hobby-horse. I put my hand up to my frontal sinus and gave a cry of distress.

"Is there anything I can get you, sir?" asked Seascale, instantly resuming his stewardly duties.

"Nothing, thank you. But turn out the light."

"Certainly, sir. Then I'll go, sir, and I hope you'll have a good night, sir."

"Thank you. Good night."

There was darkness. The door closed gently. I lay quite still. If I had not felt so ill I would have switched on the light, risen, and, looking in the mirror, have examined my frontal sinus, the hall-mark of genius. But the effort was

too much. In the darkness, awaiting sleep, my mind began to dwell on my bumps.

I had only once before met a phrenologist, and as that was more than thirty years ago, when I was a very small boy, the frontal sinus proclaiming genius must have been quite pronounced then, for I recall now the excitement that distant encounter with a phrenologist had created. It occurred at a dreary seaside resort to which I had been taken for a day's excursion by a relative. I had ridden on a donkey, made a sand castle, pulled it down, paddled, consumed three ices, and reached the fractious stage at which my long-suffering relative alternatively threatened and cajoled me.

I was a particularly miserable little boy that day because I felt myself to be a conspicuous object among other children on the beach. My mother had made me a print washing-suit which consisted of shorts and a blouse. It was blue with a thin white stripe, and I wore a sailor collar with it that had a blue-and-white edge. All my mother's loving effort had been in vain. I rebelled against it. There was a scene when I put it on, there was a scene when I was taken out, and my day was completely wrecked by the humiliation of wearing a home-made print suit which had a blouse instead of a coat. Something had given me a conviction that I could not wear a blouse, gathered in around my waist with a piece of elastic, with white pearl buttons and a sailor collar, without escaping the derision of all other little boys promoted to tailored coats.

The unhappy day was drawing to its close. The tide had gone out, leaving a cold stretch of wave-furrowed sand. The donkeys were being herded up the lifeboat-house runway, on their homeward journey. The weak sun was setting in a sullen bank of clouds. Tired mothers, crying babies,

and bedraggled children began to leave the beach and make their way to boarding houses, or the railway station. My relative, worn out, poor woman, by her ugly little charge, joined the retreating throng.

Suddenly she stopped and clutched me by the hand, while she read a long announcement, with the design of a head divided into numbered sections, that hung over a small tent. Slowly I spelled out the large letters that ran across the top of the shiny poster, *Man, Know Thyself*. Lower down, immediately over the curtained entrance, there was a board with "Consult Professor Sawyer" painted on it. The tent with the curtained entrance for some reason made me think of Moses.

At that moment Moses appeared. He looked every inch a prophet, with a long beard, bushy eyebrows, and a frock-coat. But he was not terrifying; on the contrary he smiled, and putting a delicate hand on my bare head observed to my relative, "Madam, this is a most remarkable child."

The moment for such a remark could not have been better chosen. I was low in grace because of my conduct. I was in need of a tonic, of something to restore me in the eyes of my exasperated guardian. I liked the old gentleman immediately, and when, encouraged by my smile, he added, "He is a child of exceptional intelligence—won't you let me study his head," all the repugnance I would have naturally felt vanished at this free tribute to my unappreciated qualities.

We entered the tent, a small affair with two chairs, and a pedestal on which stood a hairless head in white porcelain, subdivided into squares and oblongs, each bearing a printed inscription.

The Professor put me on a chair, on which he had placed

a hassock to heighten me, after having ceremoniously begged my relative to be seated. He then began to massage my head, and there was a tense silence for a minute in that dim tent, broken only by the sound of a distant roundabout playing *Farewell, My Little Yo-San*—this being the era when the English had championed the Japanese against the Russians.

At last the oracle spoke. The frontal sinus was very impressive. This, accompanied by other phenomena, the details of which were beyond me, foretold a future of unusual brilliance. I should do well in all emotional careers, particularly as a writer, or an actor, but most particularly as a musician. My dangers were a disregard of time—the bump of time was deficient, not punctuality, but time in music—and a weak chest. If I could master that, and overcome a great danger of chest weakness, which would be at its greatest in the years between twelve and fourteen—

At this point my relative was quite overcome by the prophetic insight of Professor Sawyer.

“He has a very weak chest—you see we’ve had to use a protector,” burst out my wretched relative, and then she crowned a day of humiliation by a final insult. She rummaged under my blouse, under the front of the sailor collar, and exposed to view my scarlet shame—a vivid woollen chest protector such as were then looped round the chests of delicate children.

There was an indecent exultation between the wretches. The Professor purred with satisfaction. My relative proceeded to gulp up his prophetic wisdom. I was a musical genius who could go far, with a strengthened chest, provided the tendency to disregard time was strictly watched. “He must not gallop through his scales. Slowly, slowly,

accurately. In all things time will be his besetting fault. The frontal sinus reveals a most unusual gift, but the anterior is weak."

How that pair gabbled! At last the manipulation of the cranium ended. The prophet retreated into a corner and began to write.

"Er—your name, little man?"

I maintained silence, still mortified by the chest protector episode.

"Cecil," volunteered my relative, genially.

"A most remarkable name, borne by great statesmen and explorers," said the old man, gravely. "You will add to its lustre, I'm sure."

He beamed at me, and advanced, holding out a folded sheet of paper towards my relative.

"I have charted his future, with particular attention to his gifts, and the weaknesses that detract from fulfilment. I have suggested the piano. He might become a great pianist—with attention to time."

My relative took the paper, solemn-faced, and began to open her purse.

"The consultation was a little longer—but I was engrossed by so unusual a head as Cecil's," said the Professor. "Shall we say—eighteenpence?"

The fee was paid. We were bowed out. My spirits began to rise. I was a remarkable child. I showed unusual development of the frontal sinus.

"I don't believe a word of it, of course—except about your chest," said my relative, witheringly, as we strode on towards the station.

But I knew she did, and my pride returned despite the exposure of my scarlet chest protector. Even my parents

were not proof against the old charlatan, such is the parental readiness to discover genius in one's offspring. For four years of misery I was made to learn the piano, and practise *One Hundred and One Exercises* together with scales.

In one respect only was Professor Sawyer right. I had no sense of time whatever, and used to scamper through my scales, sentenced to one hour's practice in a cold room, at a pace that defied accuracy and scandalised my music mistress.

I lay in the darkness of my birth, feeling the pitching and rolling of the ship, and hearing the incessant creaking of wood and rumbling of machinery, together with the screeching of wind, which are never absent from ships in motion. How strange that my steward should have evoked from the dead years so vivid a recollection of Professor Sawyer and that visit to the beach. Thirty-four years ago! I did not quite believe I could know anything that happened thirty-four years ago. Somehow one never expects to live so long, to look back so far; at least not when one is very young. And now, as I went southwards down the Atlantic ocean, in the loneliness of the night I thought of that seaside resort, with the donkeys, the phrenologist's tent, and my relative, so patient and kind with an obstreperous little boy. Poor soul, she had married a man killed in the Great War, buried her two children, and died after a long, painful illness. Yet I could see her bony hand now, plunging in my blouse to expose the shameful red-flannel chest protector.

I resolved to probe into Seascale's phrenological lore. He was an extraordinary fellow with his passion for symphony orchestras and interesting types. My frontal sinus had qualified me for his gallery. One thing we shared in common, our dislike for the sea.

The ship just then gave a tremendous roll. Halfway over she seemed to hang, and I wondered if she were coming back. I wondered also how the Wellington-Solomons were getting on, whether they were good sailors, or were stowed away like myself. The Duchess and her companion, the pretty little Countess, seemed to like the verandah café. The Duchess had had her deck-chair placed so that other passengers saw only the back of her head, and a hand that shot out with regular rhythm as she worked her embroidery.

It had been made obvious from the earliest moment that she did not want to know anyone on board, and her clear intention was respected. One or two officers who had made affable overtures, based on weather observations, encountered a further depression moving from Iceland, and quickly retired. The pretty Countess sat faithfully by her companion, reading a book, but the young males taking vigorous exercise by pacing round the decks swore she gave signs that she wanted to play. The ducal guard intimidated them; and probably the wish was father to the imagined invitation.

One frustrated Lothario called the Duchess the Old Battle-Axe, an ungracious title that was unmerited, for clearly the Duchess was entitled to keep herself exclusive if she felt the company beneath her. She was not old, and, though formidable in action, no doubt, she was not aggressive. At least I preferred her thus than making herself noisy in the cocktail bar and providing one more example of high birth and low living.

Again the ship rolled, and my brushes slithered down the dressing-table. To-morrow morning we would arrive at Madeira, and for twelve hours my feet would stand on solid

earth. Then six more days of this discomfort. Florida was too far away for a bad sailor like myself.

I fell asleep.

III

Bright sunlight striking my pillow awakened me. In an instant I was aware of a change. There was no noise, no vibration. I lay still in the contemplation of this blessed relief. Then, out of the bright morning, came a voice:

“Small boy, sixpence! Mister, please, small boy sixpence!”

I jumped out of bed and peered out of my porthole. The blue sea was like glass. Round the port-side bow lay the end of Madeira's mountainous island. A mile or more across the bay, in which lay other ships, I could discern white villas on mountain terraces. There were larger, higher buildings which were probably hotels. The whole scene had become summery. The last land I had seen was wrapped in mist. Here was a clear atmosphere, and an architecture Mediterranean in style.

“Yes, sir! Small boy sixpence! Please!”

The foreign voice again came up from below me, but I could not see down out of my porthole and witness this strange offering of one small boy for sixpence. The voice suggested the small boy was offering himself. What could it mean—was he selling fruit or merely begging?

I dressed hastily and hurried on deck. As soon as I stepped out into that vivid glowing morning I began to sense the extent of my adventure, the reality of my escape from winter into sunshine. The whole town of Funchal lay out on the mountain side, shining white-fronted above the blue water. It was all like a beautiful August morning such as I

had often seen from my window in Venice, when a slight film, foretelling the noon's heat, lay over the glazed lagoon.

I avoided two dark gentlemen who wanted me to make excursions to see the tomb of the Ex-Emperor Carl of Austria, and went to the taffrail and found half a dozen craft below, hugging the side of the ship. I now understood the cry of "Small boy sixpence." There were half a dozen small boys, all in skimpy bathing shorts, shivering on the prows of rowing boats. They beseeched passengers to throw sixpence into the water, for which they dived, recovering the coin as it sank. As they were in the shadow of the ship, where both they and the water looked blue with cold, I felt they well earned the pennies, failing sixpences, for which they dived. But trade was not brisk, and, a South African liner heaving to, they moved off in the hope of better trade.

Our ship riding at anchor, I felt marvellously well, and ready to enjoy the world spread before me. The Duchess and the film star made their appearance. The Countess had donned a smart blue reefer costume, with a blue beret and a red pom-pom. The launch for the leading hotel was soon filled, and we set off shorewards, warned to catch the last boat returning at seven o'clock. In ten minutes, running through the radiant morning, we drew near to the shore, to see above us rock gardens ablaze with bougainvillæa, azaleas, mimosa, and other sub-tropical flowers. A number of our passengers were staying at Madeira, and the bad sailors among them were all in high spirits at their release from the ship.

"Why go to Florida when you can get all the sunshine you want here?" asked one of them. "Look at that!"

I looked, and 'that' consisted of terraced gardens where blazed 'the unimaginable flowers' as a poet said, where a

dozen bathers sat sunning themselves by a sea pool, where white and yellow villas had already drawn their awnings against the sun. And it was still only the second week in January. Why go to Florida? I began to ask myself the question. My ship looked so graceful at a distance, but all I suffered on her could not make her dear to me. If I had not committed myself to the Florida journey, if—

Our launch bumped against the jetty. At the top of the steps the waiting army of touts made a grand charge. We had entered Funchal at the height of its morning activity, for all the outside cafés seemed full. In ten minutes I had run into a friend, one of those world-wandering Englishmen ever absent from the homeland, but tethered to their race by the need for *The Times* and their monthly allowance. He restrained me from buying flowers from a woman whose petticoats were as gaudy as the flowers in her basket, he begged me not to be bourgeois and ride in a carriage drawn by oxen, or ride down the mountainous streets in a sledge guided by shouting Portuguese. He was shocked at the suggestion that we should visit a church with the tomb of the Ex-Emperor Carl of Austria, who had died in poverty and exile. He swiftly walked me past the wine factories, one of the recognised sights of the island.

“Don’t you ever go to see anything?” I protested.

“Not those things, really. They’re too banal.”

“Then what things?”

But he could not answer. All his life he had been travelling and refusing to see things. He talked of ‘dreadful tourists,’ and whenever I passed some of my fellow-passengers, cameras in hand and festive in manner, he exclaimed, “Just look at them!” Yet he cultivated the intellectual communism of Wells and Huxley, derived his political faith from

the *Manchester Guardian*, and never failed to wear an Old Etonian tie. When I insisted on entering a shop to buy picture postcards, and added incredulity to disgust by telling him I had a collection of over ten thousand, he felt the strain too much. We had a polite drink together and parted.

I was just in time for lunch at Reid's Hotel, with a party gathered on the terrace commanding the wide panorama of curving bay and mountains ascending in a massive amphitheatre. As I sat down I caught a glimpse of a hand shooting out in familiar style. It was the Duchess, embroidering while the world lay stretched in sunshine at her feet.

IV

The dusk fell rapidly, and the sunny day clouded over about four o'clock. An hour later it was drizzling, and, as elsewhere in these sub-tropical resorts, the melancholy of the scene was heavier than anything we experience in England, where everything is attuned to a lower key. The white villas looked cold, the mountains appeared grey, the inhabitants took on a chocolate hue. It was all rather like a stage scene when the limes are switched off. I no longer felt the slightest desire to stay on this island. When it was sunless it was greyer and more depressing than anything at home.

The last launch was due to leave at seven o'clock. In order to be safe I was on the jetty at a quarter to, and just missed an earlier launch that disappeared into the dusk. The *Princess of Connaught*, a mile away, was lit up, row on row of portholes gleaming along her black side. A little distant, the *Princess of India*, more massive, with tiers of lit portholes and lights along her high decks, looked like a busy factory shining through the darkness. All at once, as I watched, I was conscious that she was moving. Like a liv-

ing city she began to glide over the dark water. She swung round, her stern lights came into view, and then with extraordinary speed she put out to sea and dwindled down the darkening night. I recalled, with a start, that she was due to sail on her world cruise at seven o'clock, and we were sailing a quarter of an hour later.

There was no sign of a returning launch. There was no one about, no boats stationed off the jetty. What if I suddenly saw the *Princess of Connaught* swing round and put out to sea? It was seven o'clock, and the ship was more than a quarter of an hour distant by launch.

Suddenly panic seized me. I tried to make two Portuguese loungers understand that I wanted a boat to take me out to my ship. They could not understand a word of my pantomime mixed with French and Italian. It was now quite dark. The hotels on the cliff were all lit up, the harbour was deserted. How awful if I were left here, stranded, without passport or money or clothes, without pyjamas to sleep in, while all my luggage went out to the United States! I should have to go to an hotel, borrow everything, raise credit, and wait for the next boat back to England. It would then be too late and too silly to set forth for Florida. How ridiculous I should appear to all my friends who had envied my departure from the cold and rain of the English winter to the warmth of Florida.

By this time imagination had begun to play on my senses. Could I not see the *Princess of Connaught* already swinging round? There was no sound of a launch, and if I ran up the jetty in the hope of finding the harbour master I might miss a launch if it came; and probably the harbour master had gone home, or would not understand me.

I began to wonder what other people did when their

ships sailed without them. It must have happened, particularly on world cruises. One might be left in Rangoon, or Wei-Hai-Wei, or Pango Pango. For liners, of course, never turned back for passengers who had lost the boat, no more than trains went back for passengers who had lost the train.

At this moment of desperation I saw a man coming along the jetty. His grey flannel trousers and sports coat raised a desperate hope that he was English. I went towards him. He was English; moreover, he was a fellow-passenger, and he did not seem at all worried.

"There'll be a launch. They won't go without us," he said calmly. "They said the last boat was seven o'clock. It's seven now."

"I can't see one!" I replied.

He offered me a cigarette, but I was too agitated to think of smoking. He had not even a hat. I marvelled at him, and derived a little comfort from the fact that there were two of us.

"I've been sailing in ships for years. They check you on board. They won't go without us. But I was left once," he said, and thereby shattered my rising hope. "I'd had a row with the Captain, and I was late for the last launch, so the old man was delighted and sailed without me."

"Whatever did you do?"

"Found the British Consul and made him help me out. That's what he's for. He was very decent, and I had a grand time with him until I got a boat."

His cigarette glowed in the darkness. It was five minutes past seven, and cold and drizzling. I looked across the bay at Reid's Hotel. It blazed with lights. The guests were dressing for dinner. I hoped I might yet be able to do so.

"There you are, look!" said my companion.

He was right; a launch was making for our jetty. We were saved. It came nearer and nearer. Then suddenly it turned away, slowed down, and stopped. A few moments later we heard an anchor chain rattle out.

"Well, I'm damned! They've heaved to for the night!" exclaimed my companion.

We began to hail them, and after a time they started up the motor and came to the jetty. We somehow explained we had to get to the *Princess of Connaught*. They protested they had taken all the passengers back. We protested that we were two passengers, and produced the return vouchers given us by the transport company to whom the launch belonged. Reluctantly they consented to take us. We went over the black water to the ship, which I watched with anxiety, in fear that it might suddenly sail from us.

We swung round the stern. The gangway ladder was down, with an arc light above it. At the top waited an officer. The Portuguese sailors passed up a hat for contributions, and they were rewarded.

"We were getting worried about you," said the officer on duty.

And there, as I stepped aboard, stood Seascale, with the first smile I had ever seen on his melancholy face. He hustled after me as I went to my stateroom to dress for dinner, and I told him of our unpleasant experience.

"I was afraid you'd sail, and only find I was missing when you turned down my bed," I said.

Seascale actually chuckled.

"Oh, no, sir, we don't do things like that at sea. We've method," he replied. "You see, sir, every steward whose passenger hasn't returned to his cabin half an hour before the ship sails has to go and stand by the companion ladder.

The officer then knows when someone hasn't returned. I'd been waiting for you, sir."

As I struggled in my cabin with a stiff collar I saw a distant line of lights glide across my porthole and slowly disappear. And that was the last of the Old World.