

“BLUENOSE”

J. E. CAPSTICKDALE

A SHIP-LOVER since childhood, I am old enough to have known a few of the last China Tea-Clippers; the beautiful wooden *Min*, (named after the famous Foochow River) though she was the *W. B. Godfrey* of Honolulu when I knew her in the Nineties; the later “composites” (wood but with iron framing) *Titania*, *Lothair*, *Thermopylae*, and, of course, *Cutty Sark*, among others, sea-queens all and wonderful instruments for their purpose, with every line suggesting thoroughbred. But—they were sea-queens and not sea-kings, and they had all the defects of their high qualities; the thoroughbred, though swift, is not the best stayer. Power is lacking, and this quality the sea calls for in good measure.

At the other end of the scale I have known great wooden ships like *Shenandoah*, 3,154 tons register; *Roanoke*, 3,282 and *Susquehanna*, 3,463, along with the shapeless Yankee teel ships, some of them, like the *Sewalls of Bath*, of great size, but these left me cold, they were not sea-kings, only sea-loiterers. Between the small thousand-tonners and the huge lumberers the ideal lay; and for me this lay in a single ship, the *Bluenose Angola*, 1,982 tons, of *Maitland, N. S.*, if you were to go by the legend on her great yet extremely shapely counter. Really she was *Halifax*-owned, and sailed, for when I knew her, not a man in her hailed from any other port of the Seven Seas.

She lay in the *Canada Dock, Liverpool*. The day was a holiday, and I had got away from the school-ship *Conway* in the *Sloyne* so that I could at leisure feast my eyes on this altogether entrancing achievement of marine applied art. At nine in the morning I took up station on the sweet-smelling timber she had recently discharged, and commenced to “drink her in”. My eye followed her sweet unbroken sweep from taffrail to knight-heads, and I shivered with delight—the line seemed such that it would never end, and time for me stood still.

But there was more in this ship than a single line—and I had to see her all. She had three perfectly-raked masts, towering to the very empyrean it seemed to me, ending in long and

graceful skysail—poles each topped by a golden ball of a truck that, surely, had the heart of the sun in it. The long lower-masts were "built", and the iron bands were painted red, Chambers white. Otherwise the masts, and this to the very trucks, were "bright", varnished to bring out the grain of the pitchpine which had never a flaw, for I examined their every inch.

And now it was time to "take in" her great main yard, a hundred feet long if an inch, gigantic in the slings, where started a gentle taper that ended outside the lift band with six feet of graceful deadwood, that marked every spar end in the ship. Above, the yards tapered off. For harbour symmetry the upper topsail yard was three-quarters mastheaded, to proportion the diminishing drop of, first, top-gallant, then royal and finally skysail yards. This last yard, a hundred and sixty feet from the deck, was graceful to slimness, surely it could not belong to the sail plan based on a hundred-foot lower yard, and yet I was to learn that it was forty feet in length, the sail taking three men to furl it, what time the sail-carrier of a skipper decided to reduce canvas with a quartering wind.

By the time I had gathered every detail of masts and spars it was high noon, the sun was in my eyes, and the muscles of my neck, overstrained, levelled my eyes of their own accord, to take in the great sweep of blackpainted hull every strake of which had been sandpapered to glass smoothness before receiving its coats of paint. A sheer-line of gleaming yellow drew my eye along its length to where it merged into carved and sweeping headboards, a graceful cutwater, and the carved figure of a West African chief in all his manly barbarity, none other Sea Pride could have suited this noble sea king so well.

It was time for me now to leave my vantage point on the aromatic timber. I took my seat on a carling of the wharf in the shadow of a massive overhanging bow that yet held grace in every line, to catch my breath at the beauty of this ship's clear cut and slightly concave entrance which I could in my excited fancy see cleaving the water as an arrow cleaves the air.

Aft, and here I had to climb down the dock gate, down almost to the water, I found a longer clearance, also slightly concave at the line of burnished deep yellow copper, and I said aloud over and over again, "this ship can sail"—for something apart from reason told me so; told me that of all the ships in the world this was the one I should sail in. I never did so, but I have not yet changed my mind on the subject, after four decades of other ships.

At this point in my investigation my reverie was broken by a harsh and deep yet strangely musical voice from the deck of the dock gate.

"What are you doing down there?"—and I looked up, to see a man who could have come from nowhere else in the world save the Maritime Provinces.

"I am looking, Sir, at the most beautiful ship in the world."

"Well! I reckon that's a tall order, but you're not very wide of the mark. Have you seen her inside? No! Then come and do so."

"Oh! perhaps we wouldn't be allowed. I was chased off the "Wanderer" yesterday—a great four-master, broken-backed with a "Liverpool house" amidships—so I'm afraid to ask."

"No one will chase you here, they will lift off their caps to you", and they did, for as we stepped down from the gleaming topgallant rail on snow white decks, three officers appeared as if from nowhere, each with his cap under his arm—my newly made friend was this noble ship's captain, and he too was a sea-king.

I took off my uniform cap and coat, and in two hours time I had been all over the ship from Keelson to skysail truck, and I finished up by having tea in a sycamore and maple saloon, talking at the rate of a mile a minute, and evidently affording amusement to my elder.

"And how would you like to come to sea in the ship?" This hit me in a strange place. I could not speak, tears came into my eyes, worked up as I was.

"There is nothing I should like so well, Sir, but I have got my name down for a Liverpool ship, she will be home in eight months, and I never change my mind." This I could say at thirteen and a half—life was not then a complex matter—but I cannot say it now.

"Well, Son, I've no use for broken contracts myself either, and there's many a good man been trained in a limejuicer," which was very generous of him, for he knew, as I was to find out, that no seamanship training quite equalled that of the Nova Scotia men.

My friend died in Calcutta, a few months later—but this is a tale of ships.

I have never sailed in a Nova Scotia ship, but I have met them in most of the ports of the world, and everyone partook in some measure of my first ship to love, and their Masters all had something of Captain Swyny in them, or so it seemed

to me. Hardbitten men, seamen to the backbone and inveterate "sail-carriers" all; strong men physically and mentally, possessing lungs of brass.

Their ships in a way were hell-ships, discipline was iron hard; work was akin to slavery, and a blow accompanied an order as often as not, but these ships differed from the Yankee hell-ships in that they produced a race of incomparable material, while all the Yankee-trained seamen(?) were good only at hollystoning decks and other menial even if highly necessary tasks. One system was right—the other wrong.

On the other hand, many of the "Provinces'" ships were homes, in which men sailed for years on end without change. Others again were "family" ships, and these I like to think of as the happiest ships that sailed the sea, as they were the cheapest and most efficiently run. These were always to be seen in the West Indian ports, and in all such that lay between the Caribbean and the Plate; many of these were anchorage ports only in the Nineties, and then, if one saw a ship clothing herself in snow-white cotton canvas to the skysail poles while others had mastheaded topsails only, one knew at once that a Nova Scotia man had got under weigh, and the ship got always the loudest cheers from the vessels that remained in the tiers. This was equally true of the nitrate ports of the West Coast and the timber harbours of Puget Sound.

The crews of these ships brought to the wide seas the love of action and melody that had characterised their hard-bitten pioneer ancestors, but their sea-songs centred more about the Canadian rivers and backwoods than about the more austere Provinces; not entirely so, by any means, but the favourites, with the listeners, were almost always those which centred around the ancient *voyageurs* and *couriers du bois* who had lived such lives of colour.

Whenever was there a "shanty" to equal the song of Malbrouck, with its stirring "Mironton, Mironton, Mironton", or the song of the stripped lark

"*Alouet-te gentille*

Alouet-te je te plumerai",

Or the tongue-rolling blood-aerating

"*En roulant, ma boule, roulant?*"

There was never a ship like a wooden one to get the full value from a shanty, never such a sounding board as high bulwarks and deckhouses—for melody lay in the material which, with the dark-clewed and humming hollows of the sails

overhead, gave the resonant reverberations that were the very essence of the song—the song that was always of life living, often with the lid off; but then seamen never were pupils of a young ladies' seminary.

The shanty, that is now nothing more than a legend and a name, was at sea a vital force; it put new heart into strained men, brought a new set to weary shoulders, making men forget cold and privation, smoothing away many little irritations and bitternesses for long after the last strains of the air had died away. Often a strained position has been saved by a song (and this not only at sea), and shrewd cunning officers have been known to create an all-hands job for this very purpose in the ships where there was always "a job for every minute, and a song for every job".

Where are now all the ships on board which the shanties were heard? Is there a single one left to the Maritime Provinces? It is to be feared not—and by such are the Provinces the losers. Their deepwater seamen were their ambassadors, their beautiful ships the tokens of their virility. Happily the principles which both stood for were and are eternal—only the application has changed, though with the change went much of the colour of the seaways, not only of the Provinces but of the world.

I was to hear of the ANGOLA twenty years afterwards. When I mentioned her name to a Liverpool shipowner, De Wolff, himself a Nova Scotia man, this gentleman informed me that, in the eighties he had seen ANGOLA in Clover Clayton's dry dock, to commission a naval architect to "lift off" her beautiful lines for him to build to. From these he had built his four large four-posters, MATTERHORN, SILBERHORN, ENGELHORN and LYDERHORN, all fine ships, but not ANGOLAS. He had made the mistake of adding from 26 to 30 feet in their middle sections to get a larger ship, which could have neither the speed nor (being of steel construction) the sea-kindliness of ANGOLA, the ship that over forty years has caused the writer to suffer a sense of loss because he never sailed in her, as he might have done.