

which had been working up a magnificent atmosphere in either shelter deck, were brought out for an airing, and except for one they appeared to have suffered little damage. Minor incidents marked the trip, including the Engineer's flooding one store to a depth of a foot and a half. We called in at Gibraltar during the middle watch on Thursday night, disembarked hounds and mail, and proceeded on our way to Malta. Next day we were expecting to meet the Mediterranean Fleet homeward bound for the Jubilee Review, which meant meeting trouble in all probability. Enquiries from the *Calcutta* elicited no information, but later we received orders to take a passive part in a destroyer exercise. This occupied the afternoon and we then proceeded on our way.

MALTA—WORKING UP

We arrived at Malta a.m. 16th June, the island looking very parched and hot. We were greeted by the bells for Sunday church, and secured to buoys in Dockyard Creek. Grand Harbour was practically empty—*Delhi*, *Durban*, *Resource* and some sloops being the total strength. All very peaceful and pleasant—not to forget the coxswain of the boat who questioned the Officer of the Watch as to where the *St. Angelo* was lying!

Of our four weeks at Malta the first two were devoted to Gunnery and Torpedo practices and exercises. The third week was devoted to executive drill, while the last was spent in harbour getting the ship clean. We got each week-end in harbour, and with the fleet away we had plenty of room ashore. It was too hot to be very active, but most sports were available, with water-polo in the lead. During the week allotted to executive drills the ship was taken round to Ghain Tuffeha to scrub out boats and get in sand. There was an opportunity for everyone to wash off the sweat in the sea before returning to the ship.

Malta must hold more memories for most naval men than any other place abroad. Usually it seems to be completely bound up with the Service, the Navy not only crowding its

harbours but also its streets and restaurants. We were lucky in having the place almost to ourselves (for the remainder of the 3rd Cruiser Squadron sailed before we left), and we had some very happy moments. Time passed leisurely and quietly in spite of hard work when on board. But all the pleasantness was tempered with impatience to get to our appointed station. Already clouds were forming over Italy, where Abyssinian propaganda was in full swing.

We left Malta on Tuesday, 16th July, a week later than was originally planned owing to Gibraltar being unable to provide the rifle range for us, and on the passage we did a full-power trial with a dirty bottom. We arrived at Gibraltar on Friday, 19th, and berthed alongside the South Mole. *Suffolk* and *Arethusa* were in harbour, the latter on her way out to take over the flag of C.S.3. We had the week-end at Gibraltar, which provided the usual amenities in the form of bullfights and beer. On Monday morning the *Revenge* and a flotilla of destroyers entered harbour, the Flagship hoisting the farewell signal—"Attention is called to S.O.B. Article . . ."

A SPANISH BULLFIGHT

Not being able to afford a trip to Malaga, I went in the afternoon to La Linea to watch a bullfight. I had seen one before, and had then decided never to see another, but when I heard that one of the finest bull-fighters in Spain had been procured at a cost of 18,000 pesetas, I was persuaded to go. We arrived an hour early and procured two seats for 16 pesetas each, which is about nine shillings and sixpence in English money.

We followed the throng and were puzzled to find that they all avoided one row of seats, leaving this empty, and crowding themselves into the others. Failing to understand the reason, we sat ourselves down in this row, but after about ten minutes we began to feel uneasy, and by gesticulating, and our rudimentary knowledge of Spanish (chiefly the former), we discovered we were sitting in the 30-peseta seats. We rose hastily and departed to another part of the amphitheatre which was

not too crowded. Here again our visit was a brief one, for after about five minutes, two very fat Spaniards came rapidly towards us, waving their tickets in the air. We sensed trouble and rose to see what was the matter, and it appeared that we were now in the 24-peseta seats, and that they were numbered, and their tickets were for our seats. With a "Dispensene Vd" we departed, and as by now the ring was crowded to overflowing, we were rather worried. Just as we were becoming rather hot and bothered, we saw the Navigator and some other officers in a worse plight than ourselves. We joined the parties, and finally sat on the floor at the feet of the august people who sat in the 32-peseta seats.

Soon after we had settled down, the parade of the fighters took place. They came out opposite the President, and marched up to him, bowing as they arrived at the foot of his box, and then wheeling round and taking up their positions for the first fight.

The procedure of a fight is as follows. The door is opened at the end of the arena, and the bull, which has previously been starved and kept in darkness, charges out and is at first blinded by the light.

In the arena with it are about four toreadors, and they are given five minutes to work the bull up to a sufficient rage for the picadors who follow. These toreadors each have a red cloak and as soon as the bull gets accustomed to the light, it charges at the nearest cloak, and is taunted into fury by these toreadors as it charges from one to the other.

At the end of five minutes, a bugle is blown, and the picadors enter on their horses, with long poles with a short knife on the end. The horse is blindfolded and slightly padded on one side, and is led in by an attendant, who guides it by beating it on the hindquarters with a stick.

When the horse is manoeuvred into a position near the edge, in front of the expensive seats, it is held there, and the bull is induced to charge at it. When the horse has received the impact of the charge, the picador plunges his long pole with the knife on the end into the bull and endeavours to

prevent it from pinning the horse against the edge of the arena.

This he almost invariably fails to do, and the horse is led away badly gored, to be sewed up for the next fight, whilst the picador calmly mounts another one. This is sport, so the Spaniards tell us, but I certainly failed to appreciate it. The point of having a horse was entirely lost to me, since it did not move about, nor did the picador manoeuvre it with intention to dodge the bull, and, to me, it seems that this is an entirely unnecessary part of the fight, entirely lacking in both skill and humanity. After another five minutes the trumpet is again blown, and the picadors retire, usually having administered about three thrusts at the bull.

The banderilleros now enter, each with two darts. The toreadors manoeuvre the bull into a good position and a banderillero then runs towards it with the darts held above his head. The bull then charges towards him, and as they approach, he plants the darts in its shoulder and swerves to one side or the other.

At the end of their five minutes the banderilleros have usually planted about six or eight darts, and then enters the big man of the fight.

He is the matador and enters with a sword and cape. He hides the sword along the back of the cape, and plays the bull for the purpose of making it realize that he is the man to be charged at, not the toreadors; he then takes his sword, and holding the hilt in the front of his eye, he sights along it at the spot on the bull's shoulder which has to be pierced. He then waits for it to charge, and as it does, he rams home the sword and quickly sidesteps. If he is a first-class matador, this should be the *coup de grâce*, and the dead bull is dragged off by two horses amidst wild cheering.

My feelings on coming away from the bullfight were not of an afternoon well spent, but rather a feeling of sickness and disgust, mingled, I will admit, with some admiration.

There is undoubtedly more skill in every branch of bullfighting (with the exception of the picador) than almost any game we possess in England, but when to give occasions to

display this skill one has to be almost inconceivably inhuman, the sport immediately sinks to the lowest depths of degradation. That this should still be the national sport of a supposedly civilized European race is to me inconceivable, and I am glad to hear that its popularity is waning.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST CRUISE

THE trip across to Trinidad was without incident; after a few days of cloud and swell we ran into perfect weather for the rest of the way. We passed Tobago and arrived at Point-au-Pierre on the morning of 3rd August. The ship nosed her way in through very oily water to the rickety pier and secured to the end of it. The overpowering stench of oil fuel pervaded every part of the ship, the generally dismal outlook not being brightened when it started to rain. Some of us got the chance of seeing the Regent Oil Company's refinery ashore, but we were all glad when the ship slipped at 1400 and proceeded to Port of Spain. The anchor rattled out as we came to about 3 miles from the shore. Great green mountains rose up behind the town, whole myriad lights twinkled through the trees. We had arrived at last.

TRINIDAD

Trinidad is getting rather familiar through the medium of romantic short-story writers. Throbbing tropical nights, and moonlight over the palm trees. However, there is no doubt that it was a very attractive place, especially after the parched laziness of the Mediterranean. Port of Spain treated us to a series of wonderful sunsets and sunrises, followed by tropical showers throughout the day. The people ashore did not seem very well warned of our coming, but they woke up and extended a very warm welcome to us. Trips were arranged to the famous pitch lake, others were taken round and shown some of the luxurious tropical scenery, while every day there

was football on the Savannah, that delightful park-like stretch of grassland behind the town.

At night, apart from the attractions of the town, there were several clubs which gave excellent dances, the best of which were those at the Country Club, where in romantic surroundings they had built a very good dance floor and engaged a very good band. For other tastes there were many attractions in the town—cinemas and restaurants.

Bathing is a thing that one is inclined to take as a matter of course in the West Indies, and it was rather disappointing to have to drive some way out to Macqueripe Bay for a bathe, and even then to find the water very thick with products of the forest, a kind of thick green slime which was difficult to move through. However, the drive out there almost makes up for it, with some lovely scenes as the road skirts the sea.

On the Sunday a conspiracy was hatched between the Sports Officer and his accomplices ashore, and fifteen unsuspecting men were inveigled into playing rigger against one of the island clubs. It stands to their great credit that they were able to stand up to a team that was used to playing in a temperature slightly over blood heat (so it seemed) and on a cast-iron ground; theirs was the victory by a wide margin, but it was a sporting game.

We had our first experience of "At Homes" and ship visitors. It rained hard all the afternoon of the "At Home"—a habit which stayed with us on our first cruise—and we were able to learn a little of the art of managing these affairs, which has since become second nature to us. In the matter of numbers we were lucky, and it was left to La Guaira to teach us that lesson.

We left Trinidad on 12th August, with happy memories of our first taste of West Indian hospitality.

LA GUAIRA—VENEZUELA

Our first taste of South America was rather bewildering. La Guaira is a hot and dirty little town acting as the port for Caracas, the capital. The latter is situated some 20 miles

inland up in the mountains and is reached by train or by road. In La Guaira there was very little to do, whereas in Caracas we were able to get a clear insight into South American life.

CARACAS, THE CAPITAL OF VENEZUELA

Caracas, like Leicester Square, can be looked at from many angles. No two people in the ship carried away the same impressions. To some it was a fiesta, to others a fiasco.

Two factors weighed heavily on the credit side. Venezuela had not been visited by a British warship for 3 years, and at that time Dictator Gomez ruled with an iron hand backed by over 25 years of prestige. Whatever turbulent forces swirled under the surface, Venezuela gave the impression of a country at peace and ready to welcome the "bizarre British sailors."

Taken all round, the visit was a success, and may, perhaps, have given us more laughs per minute than any other port visited in South America. Laughs, that is, with many a sinister note in them . . . such as were occasioned by the 600 guests who surprised and delighted us with their unexpected presence at the reception on board during the last Sunday of our stay.

But humour could be found in almost all our proceedings. Perhaps because this was the first South American port we had visited, perhaps because of the general air of musical comedy which surrounded all our activity—but most of all through the services of the inimitable Lieutenant Gramcko, Venezuelan Navy, our liaison officer.

Gramcko's performance during the seven days of our visit had the polish of a first-rate comedian. In any conversation where tact might be required, Gramcko could be relied on to blunder through like the proverbial bull in the china shop; during any ceremony where monotony threatened to overcome dignity, you could count on Gramcko to drop his revolver; in a visit to the Museum it was Gramcko who tripped over a statue—in fact, to one or two of us, Caracas was Gramcko.

Gramcko's knowledge of English was a tender little plant. At the first breath of argument it shrivelled up. Further conversation was conducted in Spanish or not at all. His

patience, however, was phenomenal. It needed to be. For Gramcko had been set what was probably the most difficult task of his career—namely, stage-managing our visit.

"We have put eight rooms at the Hôtel Majestic," wrote the Venezuelan Government, "at the disposal of your officers during the ship's visit." On the first night furthermore accommodation was to be arranged for all officers attending the reception at the British Legation.

The Hôtel Majestic cost half a million pounds to construct. It was paid for on the nail and was the property of a very fat old gentleman who used to sit in the office typing out the day's menus. It was a large hotel designed by a small man; it had every modern gadget—half of which had ceased to work—and the hotel staff seemed doubtful of their purpose; its carpets were threadbare and under 10 per cent of its rooms were occupied.

However, the bedrooms were comfortable, and though the service left much to be desired, those who had the luck to stay there enjoyed themselves. Gramcko certainly did, for he was installed in a suite of his own and behaved like a child charmed by a new toy.

With the Hôtel Majestic as base the Captain paid and received official calls and was shown something of the modern city of Caracas. There were many fine buildings and wide streets. Art was practical and much in evidence—the walls of the Foreign Office had frescoes of life in every country of the world and the Elliptical Hall had stirring battle scenes painted on its dome-shaped ceiling.

The ship's band played in the main square one night and was given an enthusiastic reception—despite the fact that it was pitted against a band four times its size—the idea apparently being that each should play "typical national tunes." Not, of course, at the same time. The performance was broadcast. Two football matches were also played, and our opponents proved themselves to be even more wiry and quick-footed than had been expected.

Caracas also gave many of us our first experience of Pelota—a Basque game played in an oblong court by four players.

Each wears a scoop-shaped basket on his right wrist and the game is fast and interesting to watch.

A fine piece of showmanship was carried out one morning when a seaman company and the Royal Marine Band marched up to the Pantheon—the large tomb where the remains of Simon Bolivar, the liberator, are enshrined—and the Captain, accompanied by the British Minister, laid an ornate silver-leaved wreath in homage to Bolivar.

There was little else of lasting interest. Many parties took place for both officers and men—and the hospitality we received helped us to get at least a superficial impression of one of the strangest countries in South America, a country which has the third largest oil production in the world, where torture is still in use, where immense wealth and striking poverty exist side by side with no barrier of middle class between them, and a country which was as sadly and dishonestly misgoverned as any in the continent.

GRENADA

We left La Guaira on 20th August and a day's steaming brought us to Grenada, and there for five days we basked in the sun and recovered from a hectic week in Venezuela. Grenada, off the track of steamers and most cruising liners, is one of the most beautiful of the West Indian Islands. In natural beauty, most people put it second only to Tobago, so for us it appeared the most beautiful. Georgetown, the capital and seat of Government of the Windward Islands, lies snugly in an attractive little harbour looking somehow like a Cornish fishing village, with its red roofs and church spire.

The ship lay about two miles out, and boats were run both to Georgetown and to the bathing beach, the Grande Anse. The latter was a lovely spot, with perfect bathing under perfect conditions. It represents the story-book idea of a West Indian isle, clear blue water lapping on the silver sand, with palm trees to form a background to the picture. Sharks and barracuda, though plentiful in the bay, have not been known near the beach to disturb the bather's peace.

There is but a small white population in the island, and

coloured people are accepted in official and social circles. This absence of colour bar has had the result of forming a very definite social scale amongst the native population, and the higher class have all the rights and privileges of white society.

The scenery in the hilly districts of the island is magnificent. Even a short drive up behind Georgetown gives some very fine views, and when one has time to go into the interior a fairyland of tropical vegetation is revealed. Rare flowering plants, deep valleys, waterfalls, are all to be seen within quite a short distance of the port. Parts of the island are flat and there sugar is cultivated. Elsewhere cocoa, bananas, coffee and nutmeg are grown.

There is a football ground near the town, and several sporting games were played. For the rest bathing was the main attraction, and I think that many of us would welcome a couple of quiet days there again before the end of the Commission.

ST. LUCIA

We arrived at Port Castries on Monday, 26th August, the two seaplanes having flown on ahead the night before. The harbour is nearly landlocked, the ship lying with but a few yards between the bows and the jetty. Our stay was quite short—four days—but the weather was not good and we found it very hot and sticky. Landing parties trod the well-known grass at Vigie, and football was played in the heat on the ground behind the town. Bathing at Vigie was popular and very easy to get to, although it could not compare with Grande Anse.

The town itself is rather dirty and ramshackle, having been burnt down several times during its career. In the old days Port Castries was an important coaling station, but the coming of oil fuel as the primary source of energy in ships has brought with it a decline in prosperity for St. Lucia, and to-day a very large proportion of the population is unemployed and inclined to be restive. Visits of H.M. ships are therefore popular with the small white population and are quite frequent.

There are no free social conditions as in Grenada, and the

small white community were very kind and hospitable. The golf-club at Vigie is their one place for social gatherings, and many of them accompanied us hacking our way round the links. Sailing picnics were popular, though time did not admit of an expedition to Pigeon Island, off the north-west corner of the island, whence Rodney kept his watch on de Grasse. For historians St. Lucia supplies good material, for it has a chequered and exciting career. We found it hot and not very interesting. The scenic beauties of the interior were very inaccessible and only a few were able to see them. It has, however, given our photography firm the chance of getting one of the best photographs of the ship that we have.

BARBADOS

We sailed from Port Castries on 30th August and arrived at Carlisle Bay, Barbados, the same day. The aircraft were exercised in recovery at sea, which was carried out successfully except for slight damage to one of them. On arrival we found a mail waiting for us, which is a good start to any visit. Barbados, however, is but a hazy memory from our first visit. After a peaceful enough start, the last few days were disturbed by a series of rumours and alarms which finally culminated in our farewell to the station. On Monday, 2nd September, we received news of a hurricane which was advancing on Cuba. As we were fulfilling the rôle of hurricane cruiser for the time being this concerned us closely. The next day, the ship having been put at two hours' notice, there was great demand for hurricane news. In the evening the report came through that it had passed Cuba without inflicting any damage, and thus passing out of our sphere of action. We were permitted to revert to normal notice for steam and set about to make the best of our remaining days before sailing for Rio. However, at 0200 on 5th September guns and sirens proclaimed the fact that we were at half-hour's notice, the explanation given being that the hurricane had struck Florida, doing great damage, and that the U.S. Government had been offered our services. All that day we were held in readiness, but during the night

other factors came into play and next morning we were steaming at 20 knots to Bermuda.

These great events naturally focused most of our attention at Barbados. At the same time we must not forget that between the scares we got in some very pleasant bathes. The Aquatic Club for the officers and Randall's Club for the ship's company were both accessible and well run. Certain public-spirited ladies put themselves to great trouble on behalf of the men and various trips were organized, though many arrangements had to be cancelled. With a white population of about 11,000 the island's prosperity was under a shadow owing to the drop in sugar prices, but it is hoped that the industry will recover. Large areas are under cultivation, and one can get quite lost driving through the plantations, with their picturesque windmills dotted about. The island is much flatter than others in the West Indies, but even so the northern part of the island provides some very pretty scenery. At Crane beach, on the Atlantic side, good surf-bathing is available, and the various villages strung along the coast near Bridgetown, with their homely names—Worthing, Brighton, etc.—are easy to reach and charming spots.

Barbados is different in so many ways from the other West Indian islands. It seems detached from the symmetrical arc in which the others lie. A constant sea breeze gives it a delightful climate, and about the whole island there is an atmosphere which is so English that it is a charming relief after months in foreign waters.

CHAPTER V

DISILLUSIONMENT

THE SHIPS GO EAST

I AWOKE to the whine of the turbines and the rush of water past my cabin scuttle. On deck the stores were still piled and I could see a shadowy island slipping away astern. "Is it Florida?" I asked the watchkeeper coming aft from the bridge. "No," he said. "Bermuda 17 knots, and don't ask me why 'cause I don't know." Neither did anyone else on board, then, and the whole of the next day was spent in speculation. That night, however, I was turned out to decode a message. My feeling of righteous annoyance at the way messages have of arriving in the dead of night was soon changed to a squeamish feeling in the stomach as the cypher became words—"Arrive Bermuda by daybreak on . . ." (we had reckoned on arriving p.m.) ". . . embark war stores for yourselves and . . ." (our opposite number away down South) "with utmost despatch. Report as soon as known when ready to leave Bermuda." This was no hurricane spasm. I went up to the bridge to report the message and, by the time I returned to my cabin, the turbines below had taken on a higher note.

Although details of this message were divulged only to a selected few, it was allowed to become common knowledge that hurricanes were "off" and that Bermuda was but a stepping-stone. To give vent to all the theories being hatched out in the Wardroom, the junior watchkeeper conceived the brilliant idea of a sweep as to the next port of call after Bermuda; suggestions welcomed, tickets sixpence each. Here was scope for imagination and little more, since the daily wireless Press bulletins gave little indication of warlike activity—

except, of course, from Italy, but that had been going on for months. Suggestions ranged from "Pompey" and "Guzzle" to Simonstown and Singapore. One wiseacre suggested, "No port at all—on patrol." I favoured a Yellow Peril theory, and opined that we should go straight across to Aden on our way East. I still felt hopeful when given Colon in the draw, since one could, after all, go East via the Panama Canal.

In the meantime I was much exercised as to the correct definition of "War Stores" which we were to embark. After all, H.M. ships should be ready for battle at any time, so what extra equipment would be required to meet such an unpleasant contingency? In my search for knowledge I perused handbooks on Landing Parties, Battle Organization, and bundles of Admiralty Orders, but apart from a recommendation that plenty of disinfectant was desirable in action to overcome the smell of blood, I made little progress. I decided to leave the matter to the Dockyard—they would be sure to know.

The coral reefs surrounding Bermuda require navigating in daylight, and it was two hours after daybreak on a sunny September morning when we secured to the Dockyard jetty, just ahead of the cruiser *Dragon*, whose crew lined the rails and gazed in mute surprise. For all they knew, we should have been half-way to Rio. Explanations had to wait. As soon as we were secured, out went the hurricane stores in one hoist—they had served their purpose. Dockyard officials of the type one usually never sees till the day is well advanced stood chafing to get on board, and were amongst us as soon as a brow was passed from the shore. I approached them. "I hope you've got these War Stores ready for us and . . ." I said with an expectant air. "You can have anything you like," they replied, "as long as you tell us what you want. We've never heard of War Stores before." At once I demanded disinfectant.

However, a few more things came to light during the long hot day. Protective mattresses for bolstering thinly armoured positions, paint for painting neutral grey, petrol, ammunition, provisions, and countless other commodities poured into the

ship. The crane worked continuously. Load after load was dumped on deck, to be pulled clear and rushed forward to make room for the next consignment. Every vehicle of transport seemed to be bearing down on the ship in a steady stream. Bermuda had a very restricted number of lorries (due to the prohibition of motors of all kinds in the public islands) and my request for at least one lorry was met by the provision of two horses and carts. It was too much to expect these to proceed at the gallop with a load of mattresses and drums, surmounted by half a dozen burly sailors—impatience just had to be curbed. The situation, reviewed in the Wardroom at noon by perspiring officers over pints of beer, was, however, pronounced well in hand. We should be ready by four that afternoon, but at five that evening, after a successful spurt to get everything stowed and secured, no orders had come and a feeling of disappointment began to make itself felt. It seemed a pity to have sweated so hard to no particular purpose.

I was standing disconsolately in the waist when the Captain emerged suddenly from his cabin aft and spoke to the Commander alone. This was more hopeful. The bugle call for special sea dutymen which followed was better still. We were sailing at once—steam had been at a moment's notice since four. In well under twelve hours we had arrived at a port never before visited by the ship, fuelled, ammunitioned, stored and sailed. We proceeded east at 20 knots and that night were told that we should continue at that course and speed until reaching Gibraltar. The Commander won over a pound on his sweep ticket.

For six days of perfect weather we continued practically due east, but there was plenty to be done in that time. Messages in cypher and code were being intercepted from all quarters, day and night action and defence stations were practised (roughly speaking, defence stations ensure the armament being in a position to prevent surprise until the whole ship can get to action stations). The little glamour remaining to modern warfare is hard to appreciate when exercising action stations at daybreak, after the ship has been darkened, and at defence stations all night.

PART II

MEDITERRANEAN FEVER

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VIII PORT SAID
IX EGYPT—THE POLITICAL SITUATION
X ALEXANDRIA
XI THE WAR IN ABYSSINIA AND THE FLEET CON-
CENTRATION

CHAPTER VI

ARRIVAL

WE felt hurt when, on arriving breathlessly at Gibraltar early, we were calmly told to wait outside until daylight. It seemed somewhat off-hand after we had been haring across the Atlantic by special request, but incongruities such as this were to be our daily bread for months to come. Daylight produced the answer, in this particular case, as both entrances to the Naval Harbour were closed by "gates" which were open only in daytime. Even so "Gib" looked the same as ever in the morning light. One cruiser and a few minesweepers formed the only naval force, although it was interesting to see, on closer inspection, that the latter were those which, until a very short time before, had been in reserve at home. It looked as though whatever devilment was afoot would be found in the Mediterranean. This vague theory was strengthened by the arrival that same afternoon of a Home Fleet destroyer, the paint washed off her forepart and her funnels blistered and salt-caked. She heralded the arrival the following day of two battle-cruisers, three cruisers and a destroyer flotilla, to say nothing of the gallant *Kate Lewis*, a little trawler which proudly entered Gibraltar under her own steam; having been towed out from England by a freighter, she slipped her tow in Algeciras Bay in full view of the Fleet, and headed the destroyers into harbour.

Here we were with a large section of the Home Fleet snugly installed behind booms and breakwaters, and now we began to hear tales which gave the affair a more serious tinge. Numbers of ships from home, we were told, had already entered the Mediterranean; they had left their home ports ostensibly for a destination in the South of England, slipped

through the Straits of Gibraltar under cover of darkness, and had been lost to the world until news began to filter through that they had arrived in the Eastern Mediterranean. Many of the ships newly arrived at Gibraltar had not known of their impending departure from home till twelve hours before, and the actual destination had remained secret until leaving port, with the result that the majority had brought no light clothing. Gibraltar in September seemed cool to us, fresh from the tropics, but not so to those recently experiencing the rigours of an English summer.

All this talk, and more, went on every evening ashore at the places where the Navy forgathers. It was by now an accepted fact that the State of Italy was the cause of our concentration. I say "accepted fact" as the ordinary rank and file had no official instructions on the matter. Their ships were suddenly ordered to unexpected destinations at twelve hours' notice; on arrival they found themselves behind submarine defences; at times and often for long periods various units of their ships' defence organizations were closed up; aircraft and destroyers were sent on patrols, but the Fleet in general had no definite information as to the policy which lay behind it all. I feel that we should have been far less restless, less "jumpy" even, had we been given some brief outlines of the situation which demanded the measures taken. I do not think I am exaggerating by saying "jumpy." Remember that from what was tantamount to a pleasure cruise we had been pitchforked into a situation which, for all we knew, might demand of us all or any of the duties required of a warship in wartime. To say that we were unprepared would be far from the truth; the difficulty at the time was to know, roughly, what to prepare against. To anyone with a spark of initiative a knowledge of the ultimate object of his job goes far towards ensuring its successful performance.

A very galling subject at this stage was the attitude adopted by the British newspapers. Advantage was taken of the situation by well-meaning re-armament advocates to point the weaknesses of our forces, demonstrated by sudden mobilization in the Mediterranean of units from all over the world. True

as some of the allegations may have been, their combined effect, as exploited by the Press, was apparent in creating a complete lack of confidence in the Naval Forces, an illusion which we would have been only too anxious to dispel given a tangible opportunity.

At Gibraltar we had the first definite news of our "opposite number." Last heard of on a peaceful cruise on the west coast of southernmost South America, she was arriving on the Friday, five days after us. We had never met each other before, as she had begun her southern cruise before our arrival on the station, and so from our vantage-point alongside the Detached Mole, we watched with interest her approach. When first seen she was moving at high speed and we sympathized with her engine-room people, guessing that she had been "pushed" the whole way up north from "Fifty South." Gradually her wake subsided as she eased down for the first time for weeks, and as she drew nearer we could see the scorched and blistered funnels, and the paintwork flaked and washed from her bows. As she entered harbour we had the privilege of saluting, for the first time, our Commodore's Broad Pendant—two thousand miles away from our proper station. The tale of this ship's voyage from Valparaiso in just over a fortnight is not for me to relate. Suffice to say that she only stopped once on the voyage, at the Falklands, to embark provisions, that on arrival at Gibraltar she had no greenstuff left, and that she had proceeded at the maximum speed possible with fuel available and arrived with about 30 tons of oil fuel remaining. Nevertheless, she was ready the same night to take us under her wing, and we sailed in company (for the first time) with our watchkeepers "keeping station" for the first time in the ship's history. East again—25 knots—"destination unknown"; after three hours of this we suddenly turned in our tracks and went back to Gibraltar.

We heard the reason later. Two transports had arrived at Gibraltar, just after our departure, and "in view of the situation" it was considered desirable that they should be unostentatiously escorted east. All we knew then was that we sailed from Gibraltar again the next morning at the same

time as a transport, which, strangely enough, did not lose sight of us for many days.

Now we had the first intimation of the state of affairs. Mustered aft on the quarter-deck, the ship's company was addressed by the Captain. He confessed his ignorance as to our ultimate destination on this voyage and our future in general. All he knew was that we were nearing a particular stretch of sea in which it behoved us to expect almost anything. From the following day onwards, hands would close up at defence stations continuously—from then on the Wardroom always contained officers off watch making up arrears of sleep.

We received our orders *en route*, and complied by arriving at Alexandria on the sixth day out from Gibraltar, with our protégé some miles astern. Never having seen Alexandria under normal conditions, it is difficult for me to describe the changes that must have been wrought by the sudden arrival of the majority of the Mediterranean Fleet some weeks ahead of us. Such sights as a boom at the entrance, an outer harbour so full of war vessels that the fairway into the inner harbour is hard to discern, and picket-boats armed with machine-guns, are not, however, to be seen every day in a commercial port. On arrival I took the opportunity to call on an old acquaintance in the Flagship, but all efforts at pumping failed; he either "didn't" or "wouldn't" know the answer to my importunate questions—"What was it all about?" and "How long was it likely to last?"

Returning on board at noon, I was by now sufficiently steeled against alarms to accept with equanimity the news that we were sailing again at three o'clock. In fact, I was quite pleased; I didn't like the look of Alexandria—hot, dry, flat, dusty and, I thought, far too many ships there already for comfort.

The following morning we were off the coast of Palestine, with the breakwaters and white houses of Haifa coming into view as we rounded the point below Mount Carmel. The wonderful colouring that this coast can produce in a morning sun had no interest for us that day—we were scanning the harbour for warships. Three cruisers could be seen secured

inside the newly built breakwater, a flotilla of destroyers was just coming in from sea—always a fine sight. We headed them in and secured alongside a cruiser we had last seen at Gibraltar on our way to the West Indies, and on the bridge of a destroyer just entering and securing on our other side I could pick out a friend to whom I had written some three weeks previously. I had hoped, I'd said, that he was enjoying the Home Fleet, but I wished he could come out to South America (he told me later that he'd received the letter the day before our arrival at Haifa).

Here at last we came to rest. A peremptory signal to keep steam at — hours' notice and an order to regard ourselves attached to the 3rd Cruiser Squadron.

In three weeks we had touched four continents, had been attached to three different squadrons, and on any one day had not known where we would be on the next. At last we knew where we were and to whom we belonged—for the time being; we couldn't possibly go farther east without an appreciable change in latitude.

CHAPTER VII

HAIFA

OUR stay at Haifa was the first bout of a fever which lasted some ten months. Perhaps because it was such a contrast to all we had been anticipating in South America, perhaps it was the mere fact of belonging to a squadron which was itself only a small unit of the fleet that went against the grain, or perhaps it was the Englishman's hatred of meddling in other people's affairs . . . something at any rate seemed to underline those first five weeks at Haifa as the worst in the commission.

Rear-Admiral D'Oyly Lyon came on board one forenoon to give us the benefit of his 28 years' regatta experience. This proved of help in the Fleet Regatta seven months later.

It was also largely through his initiative and the kindness of a Miss Newton, a local resident, that Newton House came into being. That there was a need for this club could be proved by anyone who spent a couple of evenings exploring Haifa.

Haifa was a city put up overnight—and looked it. Its condition could be compared to that of a Portsdown Hill on which oil had been suddenly discovered. Property prices were soaring. Land, near the harbour, which a few short years ago had been worthless, was now fetching thousands of pounds an acre. Up in Hadar Harcarmel, which is the focal centre for modern Jewry, shops, cinemas and restaurants were growing like hothouse fruit. At night neon signs made every street gay. You could not help wondering, as you threaded your way through the oddest collection of human life in Asia Minor, what Elijah would have said had he deserted his near-by brook, Kishon, and taken a look at modern Mount Carmel. In any

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case it would have been an aeroplane and not a raven that delivered his daily food.

Public attention occasionally focuses on Palestine. The Arab rebellion and the almost unsolvable deadlock which followed is an unfortunate affair with which to galvanize attention. A more illuminating sideline was the first concert given by the new Jewish symphony orchestra at Tel-Aviv late in 1936. A concert in itself means nothing, but the fact that Toscanini, perhaps the world's greatest conductor, came across from New York especially to conduct, made people realize that Tel-Aviv and Haifa were something other than Jewish settlements on the Palestine seaboard.

Two points immediately strike your attention in Haifa. The first is the unpolished newness of the place. The houses of Hadar Harcarmel wash like waves up Mount Carmel. Each month the tide swirls higher. Soon the whole hill will be built over . . . and then? The second point is the modern Jew, who is evolving out of the hotch-potch of tongues and blood that flows yearly into Palestine. Jews of all types and classes are returning to their national home. One qualification only is needed, and that is capital amounting to about £1,000. Even this difficulty is solved, however, by various societies whose interest is to repatriate the Jews.

At the moment Jewry in Palestine has no policy, no unity and no leader. These will come later. At the moment there are too many creeds, too many ideals and too much immediate work to be done. All kinds and mentalities are making a new home for themselves in Palestine. There is the wealthy manufacturer of false teeth (or does he call himself an artificial-denture-constructor these days?) who has sold his works in America and wishes to die happy (but toothless) in the Promised Land. There is the young Communist who joins one of the collective farms springing up all over the country. There is the Anglo-Indian Jew, who marches into the Bank to enquire whether he may open an account—and lays a modest £200,000 on the counter as a first deposit. And then there is an army of architects, engineers, hotel-keepers and parasites who have come to make money. As unceasing hard

work has been the drive in Jewry for many centuries, they usually succeed, though the unique spectacle of Jews extracting money from other Jews is something which the world still has in store.

There are no veils and no dismal bundles of black-swathed femininity in Haifa these days. The men wear open-necked shirts and women bright-coloured dresses. This, considering the centuries of unhygienic tradition which enslaved Jewish women behind bars in the ghetto, is an evolution of the first order.

So much, then, for modern Palestine. During our stay in Mediterranean waters, we paid Haifa two visits. During the first we were absorbed with the possibility of war with Italy; during the second (in June 1936) our chief worry was to skip out of or into the way (depending on whether you were on leave or on duty) of Arabs muttering the curses of Islam and intent on bottle-bombing any near-by Semite.

Of events during the first five weeks there were few. Every week a full programme of exercises kept us at sea from Monday to Thursday. There was a little entertaining done by the army, and officers will remember visits to the Casino Bat-Galim, a newly built night-club with a pleasant view out to sea, but somewhat lacking in the glamour we were expecting from South America. On Sundays several parties made the 40-mile trip to the Sea of Galilee, where bathing was excellent, and to Nazareth, where a ginger-headed monk from Washington D.C. was only too pleased "to show the Naval boys around for nothing."

The Newton House Club, which lasted a year, various German restaurants (which, we trust, are still going strong), several modern cinemas and one or two cabarets made Haifa by night sufficiently interesting to tempt many of us ashore. Cinemas, generally, were expensive, but on our second visit we were surprised and delighted to receive a certain number of free tickets. A little further investigation revealed, however, that we ourselves were in reality the "star" attractions, as the presence of British sailors and officers in cinemas was taken by local Jews to be their best guarantee against the ubiquitous

bottle-bomb being lobbed into the open-air cinema that was otherwise so cool. In fact, not slap-stick but back-slap for the sailor boys!

Principal among events at Haifa was the arrival of nearly six weeks' mail in one big mound, that looked like half Mount Carmel as it piled up in the port waist. This mail had covered a large part of the earth's surface (some 10,000 miles) before finding its resting-place. During the rumble-tumble which preceded our arrival at Haifa something had to be forgotten. In our case it was the mail and two Midshipmen. Both were dispatched as a matter of routine to Rio de Janeiro when we were already half-way across the Atlantic heading for Gibraltar. Not content with that, the Admiralty and Post Office rubbed it in by sending us a rather self-congratulatory signal on their efforts. The two Midshipmen had a pleasant month's holiday coming out to Rio, an enjoyable week there and a further fortnight travelling up to Bermuda to join the *York*. The mail, unable to express its feelings, merely returned to England. When it was eventually received (after being sent to Gibraltar, Malta and Alexandria in vain), the news and remarks it contained were old enough to be classified as history.

Another event of importance was the arrival of *Arandora Star*, bent, believe it or not, on a pleasure cruise. This was before people in England fully realized the gravity of the situation. "Fun in the Mediterranean," said the shipping advertisement, "might still be had." So it might, but not quite the fun intended. "Hurry along to Healthful Haifa" was not an appropriate slogan in those anxious days. I doubt if it ever has been.

At any rate, while the tourists were up in Jerusalem, *Ajax* maintained a close entente with officers and men of *Arandora Star*—which helped in some way to break the tedium of Haifa.

On 17th October, the *Adventure* and *Despatch* arrived to augment the Semitic Squadron, and on 29th October the ominous bulk of the *Queen Elizabeth* was observed to be approaching. Little happened during her two days' stay except some very bad weather—accompanied by the usual Big Shoot—but we learnt that we should be sailing on 1st November for Port Said