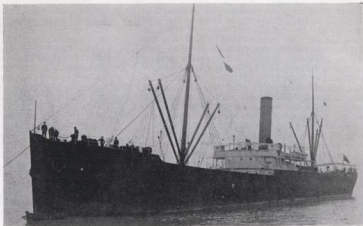


An Old Timer



THE somewhat faded photograph shown above is of the old Union-Castle cargo ship *Sabine* of 2,992 tons, built in 1894 as the *Marino*. In 1898 she was purchased by the Union Line and renamed *Sabine*. She and the *Susquehanna* were employed in carrying coal from Durban to the Cape. Her name was again changed in 1921, when she was transferred to Bullard, King and Co, and as the *Umzinto* she continued in that service until 1925, when she was sold to Dutch owners.

In 1909 she had been given a rather unusual job. The *Waratah*, a passenger liner, left Durban in July that year bound for London via Cape Town. She disappeared. Nothing was ever seen of her again. The *Sabine* was chartered to search for her, and after being fitted out with searchlights, towing gear, and bunkered and stored for a long period, she left Cape Town in September. In addition to her normal crew she had a number of Royal Naval ratings and an officer on board.

The *Sabine* had no wireless and nothing further was heard from her for about three months. Then, in December, she returned to Table Bay. Her search had been fruitless. She had covered 14,000 miles in an area of some 3,000 square miles of the Southern Ocean as far East as St. Paul's Island. No trace of the missing ship had been sighted, nor has any light been thrown on the mystery from that day to this.

Nearly half a century ago, at the beginning of the First World War in 1914, the writer of these notes made a voyage in the *Sabine* as third mate. We sailed from Cardiff bound for West African ports; rather an unusual voyage for a Union-Castle steamer. She was in fact chartered by Elder Dempster and Company, and her long thin funnel was painted yellow. We thought this rather an indignity. As can be seen from the photograph, the old ship was not much to look at; nevertheless, some of us thought she was better from the outside looking in, than she was from the inside looking out. In 1914 she still had no wireless, no electric light, no refrigerator and, of course, no such refinements as a gyro-compass and echo-sounding gear.

There was a small ice-box to keep the beer cool, and we had a few live sheep and some chickens which were later murdered more or less skilfully by the cook. This was all quite usual in small steamships of that date, and in spite of what would now be considered hardships, the *Sabine* was a happy ship.

While we were outward bound for West Africa, the German commerce raider *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse* (Willy the Grocer, to us) was known to be at large in the Atlantic. Near the Canary Islands, she captured several ships, including the Union-Castle s.s. *Galician*. The German Captain later released her because of the passengers. The *Kaiser Wilhelm* was an Atlantic liner of about 14,000 tons, converted to an armed merchant cruiser. She had sailed from Germany on the day war was declared. Naturally, a liner of her size and speed consumed a great amount of coal. With her supply ships she entered the lonely anchorage of Rio de Oro on the coast of Spanish Sahara, to fill her bunkers. Here, on 26th August, 1914, she was found by the cruiser H.M.S. *Hightflyer*, and was very soon reduced to a battered wreck and sunk at her anchor. We heard of this action when we arrived at Sierra Leone.

by
C.H.W.

The *Sabine* jogged slowly along the West African coast, calling at a good many small ports, open anchorages for the most part from Sierra Leone to Old Calabar in Nigeria. We carried our own cargo workers and surf-boats and their crews, picked up at one of the first ports. This was all very different to our usual Union-Castle ports of South and East Africa.

The old ship was not ideally suited to a very hot climate. Our small ice-box did not manage to keep anything fresh for long, and to make matters worse, the ship was infested with rats and cockroaches. We had some sport with the