



Left: The Wiscombe Park, 2,075 nett r.t., reproduced from an old and long-treasured print

Captain R.

First Voy

Those who sit huddled over their fires in the winter have no knowledge of the glories of the sea, the broadness of it, the freshness of the air—they know nothing of all the wonderful experiences that come only to those who go down to the sea in ships. . . .

THROUGH the instrumentality of a friend of my father, who was a ship broker, I was apprenticed—at £4 a year—to Messrs. Geo. Windrum & Co. and was appointed to the *Wiscombe Park*, which I joined at Bristol on 27th December, 1897. A square-rigged, three-masted ship, carrying nearly four thousand tons, the *Wiscombe Park* was about three hundred feet in length, of broad beam and loading to about 18 feet; she was a good carrier (but by no manner of means a clipper), and in her slow way reached her destinations.

The time came when all was ready for sea and the tugs were made fast. After traversing down the river we reached the open water, let go the tugs and sailed away into a favourable gale. The ship's motion soon upset me and I went to bed. The sea raged and the ship's deck was full of water. We rolled, we pitched, but I did not care; I was passing into a state of unconsciousness and remained thus for three days and three nights, not caring what became of either the ship or myself. Things in our half deck were in a hell of a state. Sea water came in through the door, everything was flung from side to side and the smells of paraffin and vinegar—as the bottles were smashed—invaded this damp, dark and unventilated place.

On the fourth morning, however, I awoke and saw the door open and could smell God's fresh air, with a touch of spring about it; in a matter of seconds I was out of my miserable bunk. The wind was fresh, and we were sailing quite nicely with a little roll or pitch now and then. I learned that we had run before a gale in the right direction and had covered six hundred miles during the three days that I had been laid low. I should say, at this stage, that details of distance and position were a close secret between the Captain and his officers and any information that was obtained was often merely conjecture, or the overhearing of a casual remark from one officer to another.

Dinner arrived—fresh beef (quite good), with potatoes and pea soup. That dinner certainly tasted good; in fact no-one who reads this will ever know how good those victuals tasted. There was a fair quantity in the half deck and the cook took what was left over and made a hash for our tea.

Just after we had had our tea the very heavens opened and let fall a cloudburst. The poop was scrubbed down, the scuppers closed, large barrels were placed to catch the rain water which was later added to our fresh-water tanks. Everyone was washing and the smell of soap reminded one of a laundry. I do not know if the storm was travelling in our direction, but I felt in my heart a thankfulness for the mercies we did receive.

With the coming of evening the rain ceased and a glorious night followed, much enjoyed by all, and after this we had no more bad weather for a long time.

There was always something for breakfast—Burgoo, or porridge, or a hash of some sort made from left-overs from the day before. The potatoes lasted about a fortnight, and whilst we had them we received no lime juice; they were stowed on the cargo, in the aft-r hold, and occasionally we were instructed to go down and pick out the bad ones. Fortunately, however, they were a good, dry brand and the bad ones were few and far between.

As a rule, we apprentices did not work with the sailors but spent our working hours mainly on the poop or around the after part of the vessel. A large amount of the time was spent in cleaning brass. Only two apprentices worked at a time while the other two watched below.

As the days went by I really began to enjoy the life, though I must admit I would have liked a little more variety in my food. When we were in the tropics there was a little more water to drink, but fresh water was a