

# 60 YEARS BACK

## FIRST VOYAGE AT SEA — PART I

COMING FROM SEAFARING STOCK, I suppose it was only natural that I should follow the sea and I signed apprenticeship indentures with the Robert Duncan Ship Co. Ltd., of 5 West Blackhall Street, Greenock; Messrs. Leitch and Muir were the Managing Owners. They had two large sailing ships, the *Robert Duncan*, a four-masted barque, and the three-masted full-rigged ship *Brunel*, and so it was, late in September, 1905, that I joined the former at Antwerp where she was loading a full cargo (3,600 tons) of super phosphates for Port Adelaide, South Australia. There was another first voyage, for which I was glad.

The crew were already on board, the ship was very nearly loaded, the Captain was A. Williams, Mr. Wolgemuth (a naturalised Britisher—German by birth) Chief Officer, Mr. Bennet (son of the Master of one of the famous Loch Line of sailing ships) Second Officer, Mr. Paton, Third Officer, Carpenter, Sailmaker, Steward, Cook and 14 A.Bs. at £3 per month. The Carpenter of a sailing ship was an expert shipwright; the Sailmaker had to make sails as well as repair them.

This was the last I should see of my brass-bound uniform for some time; it was a case of donning dungarees and the first job that the Chief Officer set me was to clean out two heavy iron biscuit tanks. They were five to six feet square. I had to crawl in through a manhole, cement wash them, and when this was dry, empty sacks of ship's biscuits till completely full, when the Carpenter would screw the manhole cover on and seal it with cement. Then I had to assist in stowing away all sorts of stores—bolts of canvas No. 0 for the heavy lower storm sails,

In these reminiscences Captain L. S. Peverley, who holds a square-rigged Master's Ticket, recalls his first voyage in sail. He went on to serve at sea with the Union-Castle Line and from 1928 until his retirement in 1961 was Clan Line Pilot at Gravesend.



No. 5 for the upper sails, such as Royals and some Stay-sails, etc.

The day came when the *Robert Duncan* was loaded and ready to sail. With precious little freeboard, more like a half tide rock, we were towed down the river by the Belgian tug *John Bull* to Flushing Roads to anchor and await a fair wind. During this passage the sailors were setting up the wire (2½ ins.) lifelines on each side of the 'midships from the break of the Forecastle to the break of the Poop and bowing them down to the corners of each hatch. Being winter now, and soon to be out in the English Channel, these were necessary for any of the crew going from forward to aft or vice versa in bad weather with the decks full of water. When we arrived at Flushing anchorage there was one other barque also waiting for favourable wind; it proved to be the German *Pampa* of the famous P. line of sailing ships, of which the record-breaking *Preussen* and *Potosi* belonged. After a couple of days a fair wind developed and it was "heave up anchor" and away under nearly full sail. We had no steam for this operation; like some ships it was all Armstrong's Patent.

We two apprentices were not allowed aloft at first but after a while ventured up to the first yard on the mizzen mast, which is the crossjack yard about 100 ft. long. The ship was well down the English Channel when a gale overtook us and sail was shortened down to six topsails, foresail and staysails and storm spanker. We were now getting out of sight of land, but we did see something unusual. A P. & O. mailsteamer steamed a full circle round the ship, no doubt for the benefit of the passengers

### Waiting to Berth

The four-masted barque Robert Duncan off the Semaphore, Port Adelaide, March, 1906.

