

P.S.N.C. mail steamer would sometimes land mails, etc., but at other times would transfer them to one of their own "coast" fleet that was calling; they had a coast fleet in those days with names such as *Panama, Mexico, Guatemala, Chile, Quillota, Quilpué*. The "home" vessels had green boot-topping, whereas in the case of the "coast" fleet it was red.

Many were the days when it was impossible for the crew to discharge our cargo by hand winch owing to heavy swell in the anchorage. Still, they were not idle. There was plenty of work round the deck, sending sails down for minor repairs to be made by the Sailmaker, or painting overside on stages. Fish was plentiful, especially crabs. We caught the latter with a hoop off a pork cask criss-crossed with ropeyarn and baited, lowered over the side on a stout fishing line; then, in a clean kerosene oil can, we would boil them over the Carpenter's forge.

One day's liberty ashore was allowed for the crew, divided into two watches. We two boys never went ashore and most of the crew were well oiled on returning after imbibing more than they could stand of the native spirit *Pisco*.

One night the nightwatchman reported violent vibrations coming from the anchor cable. The Captain and Chief Officer thought the ship might be dragging her anchor but, after repeated compass bearings, this proved not to be the case, so all was well. It was not till late the next day on the Captain's return from visiting Agents ashore that we heard the cause for the alarm—there had been a violent earthquake some 200-odd miles up the coast and the port of Valparaiso had been badly damaged.

Finally, our grain cargo was discharged and orders came that we were to take in some 1,800 tons of sand ballast and sail right up north to Portland (Oregon). This was to be another long voyage. We got away from Coronel and stood right away from the coast to get a true good breeze—it was too fitful near the coastline and variable in direction. Approaching the southern edge of the Tropics we ran into a violent thunderstorm accompanied by huge hailstones. During this, darkness came on and we saw a wonderful display of St. Elmo's Fire. The ship having steel masts and all yards being of steel, with the exception of the three Royal yards, it was like a grand pyrotechnic show, particularly on all yardarms. It was on the first part of this passage that we had a good view from aloft of the islands of St. Ambrose and St. Felix off the Chilean coast.

Crossing the Equator, we had a few days of light variable airs and calms where number two suit of sails lay limp, sometimes banging against the masts. We did not use our Royals on this ballast passage. Some ships in ballast even go to the extent of sending all Royals yards down from aloft and avoiding top weight. It was hereabouts that we caught a few sharks—steaks off small ones are not too bad although a little strong in flavour. As the shark's tail wanted to the plug on the end of our steel jibboom wanted renewing this was done (most ships have one for luck). We also caught a few albacore, bonito and dolphin. It is interesting when going through the water at a few knots to be on a lower yard and see flying fish skimming over the sea a few feet above, only to be caught by a dolphin as soon as it enters the sea again.



**A Stern Wheeler**

*Two four-masted barques being towed up the Columbia River, both in ballast, one with single top gallant yards and one with double. Both have their royal yards on deck to lessen top weight. One is either drying sails or unbending them. The barque in the foreground has her starboard anchor hanging at the cut-head.*

Before leaving the tropics the bad weather suit of sails were bent and a few repairs done to the others before stowing away in the sail lockers. After a while we finally reached the entrance to the Columbia River and were taken in tow by the seagoing tug *Wululla* to the anchorage at Astoria. And it was only just in time as that night a severe gale developed and next day a large Liverpool four-masted barque, the *Peter Iredale*, was wrecked outside the river entrance in trying to make the port. She was one of the few sailing ships with a steel deck. We had to wait till the following day for the long tow up river to Portland. This was undertaken by the wooden stern wheeler *Oklahoma*. She was moored between us and a French barque from a position about amidships to aft so that all three sterns were level. She was burning wood for bunkers and we only proceeded during daylight, during which all sails were sent down from aloft and stowed away. When we did arrive at Portland one of the first to board us, apart from the American authorities, was the Padre from the Mission to Seamen, the Rev. Bernays, who brought welcome letters from home, also gifts of tobacco and cigarettes. We two apprentices, when allowed ashore, spent most of our time at the Mission where we met apprentices from other ships in port—and there were quite a few. The Mission folk, with the Padre, took us on many an outing, also an occasional visit to a theatre.

*To be continued*