



CAPTAIN GEORGE P. WOOD.

The following interesting extracts have been supplied to "The Harbour" from the private log of Captain George P. Wood, "ancient mariner," of "Nebraska," Burley-road, Artarmon.

"I was born at Belfast, Ireland, in the year 1858, and had the great misfortune to lose both my parents at a very early age, one dying soon after the other and leaving myself, and also a large family of girls, to the guardianship an old bachelor uncle. No doubt it was a great strain to have such a responsibility thrust on him. This caused him to be pretty strict. We were never allowed to associate with other children; so as I grew up I was forced to amuse myself by reading, and became quite a bookworm. Fortunately, my uncle kept plenty of reading matter in our house. My favourite author was Captain Marryat. I liked his sea stories. Through this I got an inordinate wish to go to sea, and become like some of the boys he wrote about.

"At the early age of nine uncle sent me to business in Dublin under the care of another relative, who was also very strict; what one might call a real downright growser. Owing to being kept down by him so intolerably, I made up my mind to run away to sea. Having an elder sister in Sydney, Australia, I thought it would be fine if I got out there, but how to manage the business took some studying. After thinking the matter over I saw that I would have to get to Liverpool first and trust to luck to get some means to get out to Australia from there. Want of funds, of course, was the great drawback. I was pretty well found in the matter of clothes and footwear, so I made a bargain with another boy who was selling papers at North Wall, alongside the steamers that ran to Liverpool, that we should exchange clothes and boots and he should give me five shillings. The passage money was half-a-crown, so this arrangement left me with the like amount to start on my travels. Thus I left the sweet city of Dublin one night at 11 o'clock on a cattle boat along with a lot of Irish farm labourers, who annually went over to Rogland for the harvest, and we arrived safely at Liverpool next morning.

"My luck must have been in, for the master of the steamer, Captain Brown, a very nice man, took quite a lot of notice of me. He gave me a place to sleep in on the boat, and after hearing my story took me to his home at Bootle, and kept me there for nearly a week. During that time, as I found out afterwards, he arranged with a friend of his, Captain Outridge, who was master of a fine, full-rigged vessel called the 'Champion of the Seas,' to take me out to Australia in his vessel as a sort of private servant to look after his cabin and effects. Before my friend Captain Brown sailed again, he took me down to the 'Champion of the Seas.'

"We left Liverpool shortly afterwards and had a fine and prosperous passage out to Melbourne, Victoria,

in seventy-one days. There were something like 600 immigrants aboard, all of whom were awfully glad to see Australia. I had to make my way from Melbourne to Sydney. On telling Captain Outridge that I wished to go he was very loth to let me away, wishing me to go back again to Liverpool. However, he arranged for me at length to proceed in the old A.U.S.N. boat, 'Alexandria,' and I arrived in Port Jackson at the latter end of 1865, with but fourpence in my possession, and a sort of vague idea that my troubles would be over when I got to a place called Kirribilli. The steamer from Melbourne landed me at a wharf in Darling Harbour, Sydney; so I strolled about and eventually found myself down at Circular Quay, which was very different to what it is now, being full of fine sailing ships, all lying out at the end of long stages shipping their cargo of wool, etc.

"Sitting on the end of one of these stages and wondering what I was going to do, I saw a gentleman coming towards me to business in Dublin under the care of I took to be a fool, and in which surmise I proved to be correct. I asked him if he could direct me to a Mr. John Dibbs. He seemed to be a bit surprised and asked me some questions as to my name and where I had come from. He then informed me he was the identical man I wanted, and directed me to his home, which was over on what is now called North Sydney, and which could be seen from the Quay. It was a small cottage amongst the trees. He gave me sufficient to pay for getting across and told me to go to his home and remain there until he returned. I reached his house, and on knocking a lady came to the door. On telling her I was her



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brother she said it was impossible, as her only brother had been drowned in the Liffey, but I soon put all her doubts to flight. So she took me in and told me she had received word by mail from home that I had run away and some days afterwards the drowned body of a boy had been picked up from the river in Dublin. The features of the corpse were unrecognisable, but it was identified as me by the clothing. The body was taken away to Sligo, where my uncle guardian lived, and there buried, a tombstone being erected over the grave bearing my name and the cause of death. The deceased must have been the poor paper boy with whom I exchanged clothes. After being away for a considerable number of years from Ireland I visited Sligo and saw the headstone.

"My desire for a sea life being greater than ever when I had been some months in Sydney, Mr. Dibbs had me apprenticed to a firm named Merriman and Fairclough, of Millers Point, and I was sent on board a fine, almost new vessel called 'The Guiding Star,' a barque of about 600 tons register, which was quite a respectable size those days. The Captain's name was Bishop. The 'Guiding Star' had been built in Hamburg and sent to the west coast of South America with munitions of war

for the Spanish Navy. Spain was then at war with Chili. The vessel was taken by a Chilean gunboat off Valparaiso and sold as a prize of war to the firm of George Dibbs and Coy., of Sydney. She had been then sold by them to Merriman and Fairclough.

"With a cargo of coals we went to China, where I spent the next seven years of my life working out my apprenticeship aboard. When my indentures were nearly up our vessel was chartered to take a cargo of Chinese coolies to Port Chalmers, New Zealand, to work on the Molyneux gold fields for a big Chinese firm, but after a fine passage through the China Seas and out past Timor, some sort of a plague broke out amongst the Chinamen. There were many deaths and we were fully occupied in getting the bodies up and over the side. Fortunately, no Europeans were attacked. When we eventually arrived at Port Chalmers we landed but 23 out of 600; so there was some mortality.

"The vessel was fumigated and cleansed. We then went to Sydney, where we arrived after an absence of eight years. In due course I became second mate, and then the first mate of the same vessel, by the year 1875, when we were chartered to take a half cargo of coal and some 400 sheep on top of the coal down to Port Louis, Mauritius, and then load a cargo of refined sugar back to Sydney. The voyage down went alright, and we loaded our sugar but, unfortunately, the vessel never reached Sydney, she being burnt at sea eighteen days out from Port Louis.

"I had the morning watch, and as part of my duty went at daylight to open the booby hatch, so as to help ventilation. On doing so, by pushing back the slide, a rush of smoke came out of the hold. I called the master, and all hands were put on immediately to locate the fire. To do this the master had one of the main hatches removed, but we were unable to find where the blaze was and the letting in of air seemed to increase the fire below. As there seemed no prospect of getting it under the master ordered me to get the boats into the water. That was soon done. Luckily the weather was very fine and the sea nearly smooth. From the time I was apprenticed one standing order held good aboard, namely, that every Saturday afternoon the water supply and the provisions in the two large life-boats had to be renewed. These consisted of biscuits, water, preserved meat and other things, all secured in airtight tanks. This had been done for fully nine years. On getting the boats into the water the captain remarked to me, "Now you see the benefit of being prepared. We have plenty of provisions in the boats." As he made this observation I happened to look at the second mate, and he seemed so put out that I asked him what was the matter. He told me that the boats, as usual, on the previous Saturday afternoon had been cleaned out, but there had been no new stores put in, as the weather had become suddenly bad and he and his watch were employed shortening sail and getting the vessel snugged down. So there we were. We immediately tried to get the fresh-water pump going, but found the intense heat had melted the leaden pipe connecting the pump and tank. We had no means of getting at the fresh water otherwise, as it was below decks, and it was almost impossible to procure any other stores from below. The only drinking water available was a small quantity in the galley, and all canteens we could get at were also there. By this time the fire had got great headway and the decks became so hot that we were compelled to take to the boats. In places the decks were beginning to burn as we did so. Having secured a long line we made fast to the vessel and lay a good bit astern of her. Then the flames burst out of the hold and got complete possession of the craft. She was a hemp-rigged vessel. Soon she was burning slow and aloft. About 3 p.m., when the masts went over the side, she was just a mass of fire. The sugar with which she was loaded melting with the heat burnt like pitch. This continued all night, and still we hung on in hopes that those on some other craft seeing the flames might come down to investigate. By the morning the blaze was nearly out, so we deemed it advisable to cast off. The 'Guiding Star' then quickly settled into the water.

"We had three boats, the captain being in command of one, myself of another, and the second mate having charge of the third. Twenty men were distributed

amongst us. By dead reckoning from Sunday's observation, we were about 42 degrees 20 minutes south, Cape Leuwin bearing E.N.E. some 1800 miles, and St. Paul Island 600 to the north and west. After consideration we decided to try for Cape Leuwin, and hoped we might have something pass us, as we were in the track of vessels bound east or to Australia. Before dark we decided to take the second mate and his men into our boats, as the boat he had was not at all adapted for any sort of bad weather. I had now ten men and the master the same number. Each had very little provisions. We decided to keep together as long as possible. But during the following night the boats got separated and at daylight there was no sign of the captain's craft. I had in my boat three large pumpkins, two small bags of sugar, three bottles of lime juice, about six pounds of broken biscuits, and only about three gallons of fresh water. I determined to keep on for Australia and trust to fortune.

"The weather kept very fine for some time, but on the fourth day the wind freshened into a very heavy south-west gale, which brought up a mountainous sea. I had to heave to, it becoming too dangerous to run ahead any longer. So we had to manufacture a sea anchor, composed of our mast sails and oars all lashed together, and veered away at the end of the long line. I had fortunately retained when leaving the wreck. We lay thus forty-eight hours, when the weather moderated, and the sea getting less we hauled our sea anchor in-board again and got under way. The stores were now getting very low. The men were complaining bitterly and during the night of the seventh day two went out of their minds and disappeared. By this time we were all in a very low condition. Two others died as they lay in the boat next day and three more passed away on the day following, leaving only a half-caste boy, a Chinaman and myself alive. The boat was a double ender and was steered by an oar, which work devolved on the half-caste and myself, as the Chinaman could not steer. The weather still kept fine and we were getting along slowly, but the work of steering was too heavy, so we had at length to lower our sails and lay to, awaiting the end, which could not be far off now, as all our provisions and water were done. How long we lay thus I do not know, but on becoming conscious I found myself lying in a bunk on a nice soft bed. I lay there wondering where I was, but knew soon I must be in a vessel by the motion, and after a time a big man came into the small room. He was so big he seemed to fill it up. Seeing my eyes open he spoke to me, but I could not understand him. After a few minutes he spoke in English, saying, "I see you are better." He then went out and returned with another man, whom I afterwards came to know as the master or skipper. The latter asked if I would like something to eat and drink. On my expressing a great desire for nourishment they soon had a large wooden bowl of boiled barley with molasses and butter alongside of me. But as I was too weak to help myself they had to feed me. I must have gone to sleep later, for a couple of days or so it seemed. They fed me at intervals and looked after me until I got strength and life to crawl out on deck, when they told me all I wanted to know.

"From the mate I learned I was on the Dutch vessel 'Sebastian Potts,' 1800 tons, of Rotterdam, bound from Liverpool to Sourabaya, in Java, and that on the morning of the 1st November, 1875, one of the crew, having been sent aloft, reported a small boat away on the star-board bow. They sailed down towards it and found it was a ship's boat with two masts standing. As the wind was very light and sea smooth they sailed alongside and a man slid down a rope and secured the boat. They found two men, or the remains of men, lying under the sails, and one aft with some sign of life still in him; so they passed the only one surviving up on deck, and after annexing the masts sails and oars they parbuckled the boat up and spilled the contents into the sea, taking the boat on board afterwards. The only live one of the ten who started from the ill-fated 'Guiding Star' was myself. According to their statement, I must have been in the boat for fifteen days, for well I remember that it was on the 16th October that we cast off from the burning vessel. I must have been unconscious for

fully seven or eight days. Nothing was ever heard of the captain and those in his boat. I was taken to Sourabaya. After being ashore there a few days I procured a berth on a brig hailing from Melbourne named the 'Wild Wave,' Captain Fetherill, shipping as cook and steward. We made a favourable passage down to Fremantle, Western Australia, and after a few days lying in the roadstead there got under way again, bound to Port Nicol, on the north-west coast. We returned to Fremantle and went on to Adelaide and Melbourne, where I left the brig and returned to Sydney, with the full determination of going to sea no more.

"But after a short stay at home I shipped as second mate in the 'Orange Grove,' bound for Singapore. From there I went to Hong Kong and joined the 'Maid of Judah,' belonging to Messrs. Cowlishaw Bros. I made various voyages in her between Sydney and China, and then joined Messrs. Howard Smith steamers, where I remained for some time, up till 1881, when I got married and joined Mr. J. C. Ellis' employ, trading to China and other Eastern ports, and as far round as the Persian Gulf and Red Sea, having charge of the barque 'Brunette' and other vessels. I also served a good spell for him in the inter-colonial trade. This allowed me to be home oftener. When Mr. Ellis gave up his shipping business I got engaged to take the full-rigged ship 'Rimadale' from Sydney to Newcastle-on-Tyne with a cargo of shale and tallow. We left Sydney 28th September, 1892. Off the Western Islands, we met some very bad weather, during which our cargo shifted and the vessel was thrown on her beam ends, lying with her starboard bulkheads well submerged. My wife and two boys were with me and were down in the sea. I managed to get down into the cabin and found that the bulkhead had started. Gear berth and room on the starboard side was half-full of water but, fortunately, our bunks were pretty high, so my wife and boys had taken refuge in the top one, a foot above the level of the water. Mrs. Wood was pretty well frightened, but the boys were too young to understand our danger and were amusing themselves with some cotton and bent pins trying to catch something. Very soon the first mate and I had them out of their precarious position, and put into snugger quarters on the high side of the cabin. The vessel lay in this slanting position all night. At daylight, after breaking down the after bulkhead in the lazarette, all hands started to trim the vessel. After a continuous spell of forty-eight hours' work we got her just sufficiently upright to manage. We arrived at Newcastle, however, with a considerable list to starboard.

"At the end of a six months' stay in England we returned to Sydney, coming out in the S.S. 'Austral,' which had been previously sunk in Neutral Bay and then re-floated.

"I was later appointed to take charge of a barquentine called the 'River Hunter,' belonging to Messrs. Barr, Gillian and Coy., of Newcastle, N.S.W., and remained as master on her for about three years. During that period she was chartered and loaded for New Zealand, leaving Newcastle on the morning of the noted Maitland gale. We experienced the full force of it a few miles off the land. Of two other vessels that left at the same time one, the 'Crown of India,' was dismasted and afterwards lowered into Sydney. The other, the 'Flado,' disappeared in the gale. She must have foundered, as we saw her about 8 p.m. trying to wear so as to get back to Newcastle. We were somewhere off Port Stephens then and managed to scrape off the land, but lost a full suit of sails doing so. On turning up at Kaipara Heads a month out from Newcastle, I was informed that my vessel was reported by the 'Crown of India' as having been lost. Her master must have seen the 'Flado' in distress and mistaken her for us.

"On my return to Sydney I was relieved by Captain Neilson but soon got fresh employment with Messrs. Nelson and Robertson, being appointed to the command of the barque 'Mary Moore.' I made in her a number of voyages in the inter-colonial trade. In 1897 we were chartered by the Pacific Island Coy. to go from Melbourne to Baker Island and there load a cargo of kumano for Melbourne. At Baker Island I found that the Norwegian barque 'Carriall' had been at the quay loading, but a westerly gale coming on she carried away the masts

and went on the reef, becoming a total wreck. The crew were all on the island, and as there seemed no possible hope of my vessel being loaded, the captain of the island, Captain Peit, ordered me to take the shipwrecked crew and proceed to Apia if possible—if not Suva—and there await orders from Sydney. We shipped the crew, but I could only make the east end of the Fijian Islands. A hurricane struck the vessel, and as she was only in ballast trim she simply laid down to it. For three days, while it lasted, we were almost on our side. It was an anxious time for all on board, especially for Mrs. Wood, who happened to be with me again. During the height of the hurricane my attention was drawn by my chief officer (the late Captain Brown) that some things like birds were being carried along with the thick fume and spume of the sea, but it was so dense and thick it was impossible to distinguish what it was. We found when the storm died away that the metal sheathing on the starboard side had completely disappeared, having been stripped by the tremendous force of the wind. It was more than fortunate that we had the foresight to have the ballast tumbled down so that it could not shift.

"We arrived safely in Suva. The crew of the 'Carriall' were forwarded by the first steamer going, also letters to our owners and charterers. After waiting two months I received orders to load coals and provisions at Fiji. We had to remodel the vessel as we lay at anchor in Suva. I was ordered round to Levuka to load for Sydney, and while there fell in with another hurricane and had to move out from the wharf and anchor inside of the reef. We dragged anchors and nearly collided with the hulk 'Asia,' which was then lying there. Later we got back to the wharf and finished loading, and soon after left for Sydney.

"I remained in the 'Mary Moore' until 1901, part of the time being spent in the inter-colonial trade. I also had a spell down at the Gilbert Islands in charge of the S.S. 'St. George,' for the firm of On Cheong and Coy., of Sydney. After leaving the Chinese firm I was engaged to take the auxiliary ketch 'Sir John Forrest' to Suva, from Thursday Island. We had a most trying and tedious trip there, and after lying for some fourteen weeks in harbour, the company she belonged to decided to lay her up indefinitely. So they dispensed with me and the crew, sending us all home again."

It was reported from Newcastle on 25th May that every mill at the Broken Hill Proprietary Company's steel works at Port Waratah had been closed down. Over 4000 men had thus been thrown idle.

B.H.P. MILLS At the date mentioned the company was still employing 1200 others in doing what was called "overhauling work."

That the conditions in the iron and steel industry do not press equally hard in other directions is apparently shown by an announcement made the previous evening by Mr. C. Hoskins, of Hoskins' Iron and Steel Company, Lithgow, namely, that his company does not intend to close down, although it is now selling some of its products at less than they cost to manufacture.

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