

A VETERAN NAVIGATOR TALKS OF HIS EXPERIENCE

Capt. J. A. Read of This City Retiring From the Sea After Fifty-Five Years of Service--Has Handled all Kinds of Sailing Craft--Thinks Canadians Should Build Ships and go After the Trade of South American Republics.

(Halifax Chronicle.)

"Home is the sailor, home from sea,
And a right sturdy man is he,
Is he, is he."

The undulating rhythm of the rollicking old sea song went lilting through my mind as I stepped ashore from the Melba.

The lure of shipboard has taken me of recent years to almost every sort of vessel afloat, from the smallest to the largest, but it was only the other evening that I had the compliment of a handshake with the oldest sea captain in the Canadian mercantile marine.

As I left him, after an hour's chat, those lines, snatched and paraphrased from an old song, came to me. They had lain dormant in a sub-conscious mind for many years, since when a lad accompanying my father I had visited his ship, an old clipper, spice laden, from the east, as she lay at anchor in a foreign port. I had heard the sailors sing it in the fo'c'sle of a night as they prepared for their first leave ashore for many a week.

Captain Joseph A. Read, master of the tern schooner Melba, had reminded me of many other things redolent of an age of shipping that goes down in our history as the "era of wooden ships." Captain Read is in his 75th year. He has been 55 years at sea. In that time he has served on or sailed almost every known type of sailing ship in the Canadian trade.

When he became shipmaster, the famous clippers were having their day and rivalling anything in steam for speed that existed at that time. He retires at a time when the gallant full

riggers are but a memory, but when the value of sail tonnage represented by the two, three and four masted schooner is beyond that value which attached to the freights in the "good old days."

Last Square Rigger Owned in N. B.

Capt. Read sailed for some years for the late Sir Albert J. Smith, of Dorchester. He is now sailing for R. C. Elkin, of St. John. He commanded for several years the bark Edna M. Smith, the last square-rigger owned in New Brunswick, and had her loaded at Bear River for the River Plate.

The Edna M. Smith was sold a year or two ago to American parties and recently lost at sea.

One of Capt. Read's daughters was formerly on the staff of the Truro Normal School, and is now the wife of Rev. E. E. Annand, a well known Presbyterian minister. Another daughter is the wife of Mr. R. P. Allen, business manager of the Daily Mail, Fredericton. Capt. Read was born in Westmorland county, N. B., but his family removed to Cumberland county when he was a boy. He looks upon himself as essentially a Nova Scotian.

There is little in the category of shipping experiences which he has escaped. Today the lure entices him as strongly as ever, but Capt. Read says: "There is nothing to sail worthy of the name."

The captain had actually retired from the sea two years ago, but on the outbreak of the war the demand for master mariners for our deep sea trade was so great that he responded. Since then Captain Read has been "doing his bit" by steering a 400 ton 3-masted

cargo carrier from Canadian ports to the South Atlantic. When arriving at Halifax last week he completed a year's continuous passage.

In this day when life is so transitory and uncertain, it is stamina to our spirit to consider a man who has passed his three-score-and-ten years and is yet endowed with vigor and virility, keenness of sight and steadiness of voice, and an alertness of gesture and movement that belong to youth. Of such is Captain Read.

"The Greatest Fleet" Gone.

"They are all gone now, the greatest fleet of wooden sailing ships under one flag," said Capt. Read, when I asked him to tell me something of the history of Nova Scotian shipping.

"The Edna M. Smith is gone, and the Calburga was the last of the Nova Scotian ships worthy of the name."

My first acquaintance with Captain Read found him sitting on the framework of a hand winch, closely observing the unloading of his vessel. It was evening, but the work of discharging steadily went on, and longshoremen were working energetically in her hold. The great cranes creaked overhead, swinging back and forth like monster arms. The big buckets gobbled up their loads and vomited them on the cars high up on the trestles.

"It's not sailing now," continued the captain after a pause in which he had critically surveyed the vessel. "This is not sailing," as he looked contemptuously around him, "and there is no seamanship now, not like the old days. There are too many restrictions in shipping laws. They will soon demand feather beds and down pillows for the crew."

"And about yourself, Captain Read, are you of a seafaring family?"

The Lure of the Sea.

"My father was a farmer, but almost all my boyhood was spent around a boat. When still a youngster I took the notion that I wanted to go to sea, but I did not make my first trip until I was about 20 years of age. Since then I have been continually at sea. Some men go to sea to make money, but I went because I liked it. Of course I wanted to make money too, but I also wanted to make it for the owners. No use sailing another man's ship unless you make money for him—but I like the sea."

In this manner did Capt. Read pursue his wholesome philosophy. And while he talked he told of the lands that have called the boyhood of this country, that have aroused the wanderlust for generations, that have stirred the inherent desire to be "up and

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going," that have called in the waking and the sleeping. And what he told were just his experiences, wholly unconscious that he was igniting fire—but the thing is racial, and that is why Nova Scotians strew the world—its solitudes and its marts.

Captain Read has had his shipwreck experiences. "Once I lost a brand new schooner, in which I was part owner. I possessed nothing else in the world, and when she was gone I had nothing—but I was young. After that I lost a bark off the Brazilian coast, and the brigantine Antilla off the coast of New Jersey."

"Did you ever go in a steamer?" I asked.

"No!" (with utmost disgust). "I don't want to. I don't like them." The emphasis was characteristic and delightful.

To this man the sailing ship was a creature endowed with life—a spirituality. The personal pronoun "she" conveyed the conception in line and body of a living entity. The sailing qualities were never credited to the skill of the designer or the shipbuilder or the expertness of the master. It was always "she" and "she" it will remain. The sailor was ever mindful of those wonderful white shrouded, gigantic, bird-like creatures into which the spirit of the deep breathed—they moved by the breath of the Creator. Seamanship was an art in those days—an art with a technique, that was a given genius, as was that of the painter, the sculptor or the writer.

"The sailing ship will never come back," said Captain Read, "for we have not the men to sail them—sailors are not made, they are born. What does a man on a steamship know of seamanship—nothing, I tell you, nothing. A steamship today is nothing but a dump cart, taking her cargo from one port to another, and her captain the driver. But of our old Canadian shipmasters—and it is true today of many of the vessel masters, they transacted their own business. There were no bothersome agents in every port who took charge—the captain had that responsibility, and to the credit of Nova Scotia captains they were capable of it."

This man talked of fifty years ago in the shipping world as if those events were of the present. He talked of other continents as if they lie just across the harbor. Captain Read, in the picturesque way of a master mariner, well read, thoughtful, and of a logical turn of mind, brought the very scent of foreign lands in his description of them.

He has seen the sun rise out of the depths of the Mediterranean and climb the skies of the Orient, and he has seen it set behind the Andes, leaving a plutonic sky above the plains of Argentina. He had smelt the multi stinks of southern ports, and had observed the northern sea gates sift out the primal tribes of Asia. All these and much more Captain Read related of things experienced by men of which he is one of the very few remaining.

Of all the countries visited, Argentina is Captain Read's favorite. "A wonderful land, made more so by the British control of practically all its finances and public utilities." Here he broke from the reminiscent to the political, and something of a politician is this mariner.

"Do you know, the Canadians ought to get busy right away to study trade conditions in the Argentine and all those South American countries. Why, Germany had an enormous trade with them before the war. We could get a big share of it, but you will have to go

(Continued on page six)



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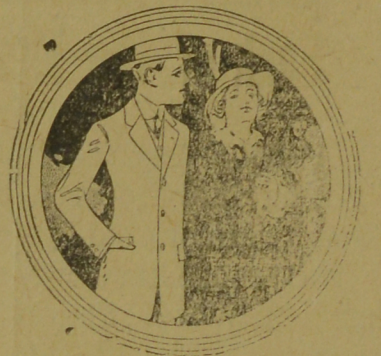
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