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HORSEBOY LEARNED THE HARD WAY

SO much acclaim has been bestowed upon the adventures of Capt. Wm. D. Graham who began his nautical career as horseboy on his uncle's schooner, and recently celebrated his 91st birthday in honor in his native St. Catharines, that we have been asked to repeat the story of another horseboy graduate, Capt. James W. Baby of Hamilton, who died March 29, this year, having almost reached the age of the St. Catharines evergreen.

Navy stuff was in this youngster, born in 1855, the last year of the Crimean War. His mother was the daughter of an officer in the old square rigged chequer-sided wooden walls which were then Britannia's bulwark, and he had been brought up in Oaklands, the family home between Corunna and Mooretown on the St. Clair river, his childhood flavored with daily spectacles of great fleets of schooners, in tow or under sail, swimming past shores where tales of the Peninsular War and Trafalgar mingled with the recent remembrance of the Fenian Raid. He wanted to be a sailor, no tea-kettle tickler, a sailor of the sail.

Through judicious "political connections" he was found a berth in a grocery store in Ottawa. He tried dutifully, for he was an obedient youngster, but found it quite impossible to grow up to be a big butter-and-egg man.

"I'm going to be a sailor," he told his employer.

"You're going to hell," the latter made reply.

He came home, and got a job nearby boring fastenings in Archibald Muir's Port Huron shipyard – an offshoot of the Port Dalhousie yard and drydock – where they were building the steamer *W.K. Vanderbilt*. A long way from being a sailor, yet, but it was on the road.

Bearded Archie Muir, fine sailor himself, was sympathetic to the teen-age youngster. He told him the brand-new schooner *Albatross*, built by his brother Alexander at Port Dalhousie, was upward bound on her maiden voyage, to Bay City, Mich., for timber. She would stop at Port Huron on the way down for a pair of masts for the next of the great "A" fleet of the Muirs, the *Antelope*, whose keel had been laid at Port Dalhousie.

In course of time this *Albatross* alighted, swimming deep with squared oak logs piled as high as the top of the bulwarks. The laddie was told to go home across the river for his clothes. A berth in her was his, on July 11th, 1871.

"I'm going to be a sailor," he gleefully told the ferryman as he crossed back from Sarnia.

"You'll only be sorry for it once," said the ferry captain, "and that will be all your life." It looked as though he was right.

The well-bred, mannerly boy, small but strong for his sixteen years, and knowing enough

about sailing already to shift a gafftopsail sheet or steer a trick, regular trick at a schooner's wheel, had come to a hard school. Timber-droghing was looked down upon in the old days; the vessels were clumsy boxes, all burthen and no beauty, their crews big-brawn-little-brains navies afloat, bossed by hardcase guys who were often, not always, foremen and section-bosses masquerading as captains and mates. Some were better and some worse. The Muir brothers, when they sailed the vessels they built, were good seamen and of good stock, and not to be included in the category just described. If heavy-handed and tightfisted, they were fair and just to all men, generous according to their opportunities, and thoroughly good sailors, crossing the Atlantic ocean often with vessels they themselves built. But when they went into the dockyard and timber business they had to take the captains and crews they could get, for the wages the trade could pay. Some of the gangs they got were hard bargains indeed.

The lad was hired as a horseboy, at \$12 a month. The *Albatross*, like other timber-droghers, had a team of horses, stabled on deck, forward of the foremast. Their stabling consisted of a manger and a pair of blankets to shelter them from the rain and the spray. They slept standing up, and had good sea legs. The horseboy had to feed, water and groom them, and drive them around the great horse-power capstan when the sticks of oak, weighing tons, were being quilled up and hoisted in, for stowage in the hold and on deck, or for skidding overboard when unloading. He also had to lead the horses on the towpath when they were canalling. He was a seagoing teamster, but on top of that he was slavey, messenger and choreboy to men, some of whom called the place where they kennelled the "boar pen," but would have been kicked out of a sty by any self-respecting he-pig.

Aft in the square deck-cabin berthed the captain, two mates and cook. All hands got their meals there at one time – save the man at the wheel – three substantial meals and a midnight lunch, from the same long dining room table.

The crew lived in the forecabin, sleeping in six bunks, narrow shelves against either bow of the *Albatross*, dark and airless. The shelves had fiddles or weather-boards, to keep the straw mattresses and their occupants from rolling out into the floor. In some forecabins beside the fiddles the bunk shelves would be littered with whiskey bottles and quack cures for the ills sailors accumulated in the hellholes of Canal Street in Buffalo, South Clark Street in Chicago, and the lower reaches of Toronto. The *Albatross* was, however, free from this plague.

The horseboy had to sleep on a straw tick laid on a couple of planks stretched across the chainlockers, which formed the seats of the forecabin. They were behind the paul-post, and the dripping anchor cables, coming down through the deck hawsepipes, kept his bed damp.

Daylight never entered this den! The "toilet" was simplicity itself, the lake for a bathtub, a bucket for a hand basin, and for anything else the wide open spaces of the bowsprit shrouds and jibboom guys, used by all hands in all weathers, with all the privacy of seagulls.

At any hour of the day or night the horseboy would be routed from his sleep and given the work the sailors of the watch should be doing. If the drogher had a royal – some of them

had, perched at the tip of the foremast like a pillbox cap – the horseboy would be sent aloft to set or furl the sail half a dozen times in a night. In making or trimming sail he had to hold slack, pull with the rest and coil up after them. If he dozed off from sheer weariness, he was roused with the toe of a sea-boot.

BUCKO BRENNAN, the mate, once tied a line to the bale of a bucket with a granny's knot, and hove it overboard. When the strain came on the knot the bucket floated away. The rope hung down the side, fast to a timberhead above. It was a calm s day and the *Albatross* was standing still, admiring her own wooden image in the smooth water. "Jump and get that bucket," the gigantic timberman bawled to the little horseboy.

The kid hesitated, and the hero hailed: "Jump before it drifts astern, or I'll throw you overboard."

The lad could swim, and he saw the Bucko meant business. He kicked off his shoes, slipped out of his shirt and trousers, and dove off from the deckload. He caught up with the bucket in a few strokes, but could not well tow it, full of water, so he made it fast, to the end of the line which was trailing alongside. His knot held – he knew most of the bends and hitches before he went to the grocery store – and Bucko hauled up the bucket and threw him back the line. He tried to haul himself up by it, but it is one thing to take a ten-foot dive down from the solid platform of the rail, and another to make a ten-foot soar from the water. It just can't be done; and even holding on to the line with both hands he could not get enough grip on the slab-sided timber drogher with his toes to climb aboard; and he was too weak to haul himself up hand over hand. All he could do was to throw a bowline in the loose end of the line ,and hang on, calling to the bully to haul him up.

"If you wait till I haul you up you'll hang there till you drown " answered the brave Bucko.

Then the boy heard a smack, ringing above the gurgling of the lake in his ears, and the rope tightened and up he rose out of the water without effort. He was pulled, gasping like a fish and naked like a fish, over the rail by the schooner's cook, a red-headed virago with arms like the oak timbers of the deckload. She was a sister of one of the crew. Most of the drogher cooks were women. Bucko. was gaping with five red stripes across his face where she had smacked him with her open hand.

"Don't mind your bare pelt, boy, I've childer of me own," said she, "and that's more than a mule like that Bucko will ever have."

(Continued next week)

(Caption) MAYBE the "GEO. A. CASE," "SUSIE CHIPMAN," "C. C. HOUGHTON" or some other Upper Laker, bound down from Chicago. We would be glad to know which. Our horseboy's first schooner was of similar model, but two-masted, which meant heavier work for both men and horses.